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## Producing Evidence for International Development in Brexit Britain: Conference Report

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# CONFERENCE REPORT

## Producing Evidence for Development in Brexit Britain

**27<sup>th</sup> -28<sup>th</sup> March 2017, UCL-Institute of Education, London**

Co-Convened by the Christian Aid Centre for Excellence for Research, Evidence and Learning and the Open University, Institute of Educational Technology



The final event in the RRP seminar series<sup>1</sup> took the form of a high-level conference. Around 100 participants (academics, students, NGO practitioners, knowledge brokers/trainers, consultants, policy makers and research funders) attended over the two-day event. The conference responded to the context of 'Brexit Britain'<sup>2</sup> to explore how research partnerships between academics and INGOs might contribute to better evidence for international development.

It aimed to:

- Share findings and recommendations from the seminar series which were based on the analysis of seven case studies of research partnerships between UK-based universities and INGOs;

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<sup>1</sup> <http://rethinkingresearchpartnerships.com>

<sup>2</sup> Referring to the complex and uncertain Brexit process itself, as well as to an eventual post-Brexit reality.

- Assess the challenges and opportunities of the current UK development context, including the SDG processes, Brexit and the shifting landscape for development research collaborations;
- Respond to and extend the analysis developed during the series with insights from beyond the UK and from other policy sectors within the UK;
- Explore strategic ways forward for the practice, governance and funding of 'evidence for development'.

While the focus of the series was on the politics of evidence and participation in research partnerships between UK-based institutions (with learning implications for British policy around research funding and international development), the conference introduced insights from other national contexts (including Brazil, Canada, Ethiopia, France, India, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the Philippines, Qatar, South Africa, Sweden, Tanzania and the United States) and other policy sectors (including the UK's 'community development' sector, education and public health).

The conference adopted a participatory approach, allowing us to draw on and respond to the vast range of expertise of participants. Participants had submitted Expressions of Interest explaining why they were interested in the event, what they hoped to get out of it and how they might contribute. This allowed us to design the agenda in a way that would maximise contribution, critical and interactive discussion and networking opportunities. We developed sessions through different formats including lightening panel talks, workshops co-designed and facilitated by academics and practitioners, open spaces for ideas, networking pitches, a gallery of evidence objects, interactive policy workshops, a world café to hone in on emerging issues, and manifestos for good practice. We also used participatory ice-breakers/networking/reflection exercises.



The conference was structured in two parts:

- Day 1: Sharing, learning and networking
- Day 2: Policy and strategy – moving forward

This report summarises the discussions and key outcomes of the event. These discussions will also contribute to the development of the primary outputs of the seminar series: a critical Discussion Guide to inform future research partnerships and a peer-reviewed publication, which explores some of the analytical themes emerging from the series.

Rather than structure this report to mirror the workshop process (i.e. a session by session account) we feel it is more helpful to cluster the discussions around key themes. The report is therefore organised as follows:

- 1. Understanding the context**
- 2. Sharing findings from the seminar series**
- 3. Channelling learning into policy and practice**

While the main text of the report focuses on the content of the discussion we have included boxes throughout the report to share the session methodologies, and give a sense of how these content areas were introduced and engaged with.

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## 1. Understanding the context

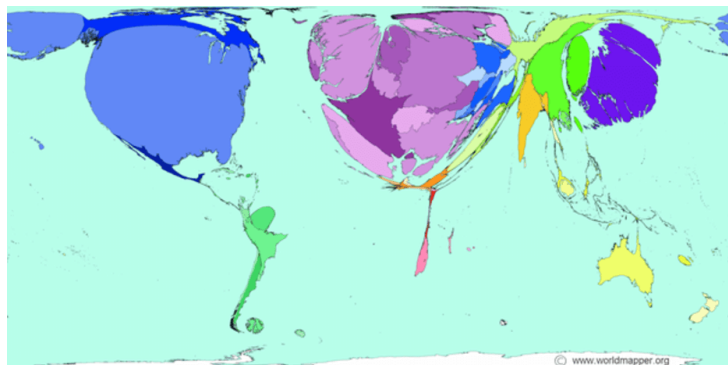
Research collaborations happen in specific spaces and places and at specific times. They do not exist independently of the world around them, and context impacts on the possibilities in these partnerships – on the individual and institutional motivations, the opportunities and the constraints that are experienced in establishing partnerships, generating funding, negotiating conceptions of evidence and roles and relationships within a research process.

The conference therefore began by considering our contemporary context and the key challenges and opportunities in ‘producing evidence for development’. Discussion kicked off with a series of lightning presentations from a panel chaired by **Elaine Unterhalter (UCL-Institute of Education)**.

Issues identified included:

### WHO PRODUCES KNOWLEDGE?

**Budd Hall (Co-UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, University of Victoria)** presented a map



of the world drawn proportionally to the officially recognised ‘production of knowledge’. The map, shown below, includes very ‘swollen’ western Europe and USA; and the rest of the world shrunk, signalling limited participation in official knowledge production (i.e. in academic journals and other publications). Responding to this current reality he shared examples of alternative knowledge production processes and outputs from the Global South; including those developed through community-based research and innovative alternatives to the traditional universities.

### CHALLENGES TO CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

**Rachel Hayman (INTRAC)** noted that in fragile contexts, civil society reaches further and deeper than any other development actor. However, civil society (including local researchers) faces shrinking political space and competition for financial resources. She posed the question: *how can we enable CSOs to have the capacity, space and independence to work effectively?* She suggested that a multi-stakeholder approach to tackling global challenges offers opportunities for CSOs to make a stronger contribution to research, and to build their capacity and credibility. She asked: *can research collaboration, therefore, open up new, safe spaces to tackle tricky development questions around inequalities, insecurities and marginalisation in difficult political contexts?*

### Session structure and approach

The conference was initiated by 7 participants sharing 2-minute reflections on a **key challenge and opportunity for research in international development in the current (UK) climate**. Following the contributions panellists joined a table of participants to discuss the challenge/opportunity, considering:

- how partnerships might respond to the challenge
- how that challenge might constrain partnerships

There was no report back from these discussions as the aim was to stimulate reflection and get participants to engage with the conference topic; setting up participation for the rest of the conference, rather than reach conclusions on the topic.

## DEVELOPMENT NARRATIVES AND SECTORAL BIAS Helen Yanacopulos (Open University)

raised the big questions of what do we understand by development, and what are we trying to producing evidence of, or for? She identified the challenge of sectoral bias in the Political Economy of international development narratives. Raising the provocation that academics are too critical about the possibilities of International Development and that INGOs are too 'optimistic' she suggested that by working across these two sectors, and acknowledging each other's 'sectoral biases', we can start exploring ways to challenge and change the broader narratives around international development.

## EMBRACING DIFFERENCE TO CHALLENGE EVIDENCE

**ASSUMPTIONS** Jill Russell (ABT Associates) drew an analogy from a popular children's television programme to explore the challenge of putting ourselves in each others shoes (slippers!) as we handle our complex but never neutral packages of 'evidence'. She argued that while relationships and friendships are essential, the focus within these partnerships should also be on conflict and uncertainty and critical reflexive processes are a means of facilitating this. This suggests that in producing new and different types of evidence the 'productive tensions' which exist in partnerships of people coming from different types of institutions can offer opportunities for creative and alternative approaches, and we need to embrace these tensions if we are to challenge certain dominant assumptions as to what 'good evidence' looks like.



## HUMANISTIC AND TECHNICAL CHANGE David Lewis (LSE)

also raised the challenge of how different actors understand development – and argued that we need to build better bridges between the 'humanistic' and the 'technical' ways different actors in development think about change. He argued that the key opportunity to do this is through broadening our frame of knowledge about development issues (beyond numbers, impact, traditional fund raising images etc.) using new and different media and forums.



**FOCUSING ON IMPACT:** Offering a perspective from a large INGO, **Irene Guijt (Oxfam)** focused on the issue of ‘impact’ and particularly the challenges of achieving impact at scale (a content challenge) and ensuring that research is embedded in development (a process challenge). As an opportunity, she argued that the development impact of research must become non-negotiable and supported by funding and policy-making structures and processes.

**AID AGENDAS:** The lightning presentations finished with **David Archer (ActionAid)** arguing that in the UK, and many other donor countries, the international aid agenda is increasingly driven by national self-interest (particularly around trade and security). Within this there is increasing emphasis on private sector engagement, introducing the profit motive into research and development agendas. He proposed that while NGOs and academics cannot claim to be neutral actors we can, particularly by working together, promote a self-reflexive approach that is conscious of the complex power dynamics between North and South, between academic and practitioner, promoting research and development agendas that go beyond our self-interest.

## 1.1 The British Context

The conference was framed explicitly in relation to Brexit Britain and the current ‘moment’ that UK academics and practitioners find themselves operating in. This framing was important as the RRP seminar series had focused specifically on research collaborations between UK-based universities and INGOs, and the British context was identified as both a key enabling and constraining factor for different aspects of those partnerships. A key finding emerging from the series was that if the partnership dynamics are to be well understood we need to appreciate the specific context through which they are shaped.

However, the series had run from February 2014-June 2016; and was completed ahead of Britain’s EU referendum. This advent of Brexit had shifted the context. Responding to this, we felt it was important to give deeper attention to Britain’s relationship with the world; and the nature of evidence in a post-truth climate.

### Policy Workshops

On the second day we ran a series of ‘*policy dilemma*’ workshops. The overall theme of these workshops was identified by the conference organisers we asked relevant individuals to take a lead on framing and running these workshops. The idea of these workshops was to create a space for participants to think critically and creatively about the issue – to discuss the challenges and opportunities it presents, and how these might be responded to within the context of research collaborations and producing useful evidence for development. Responding to these briefs the session leads developed a participatory session to encourage debate – to explore the context and its implications for research collaborations.

## Britain’s relationship with the world

**Led by John Gaventa (Institute of Development studies) and Andrew Long (DfID)**

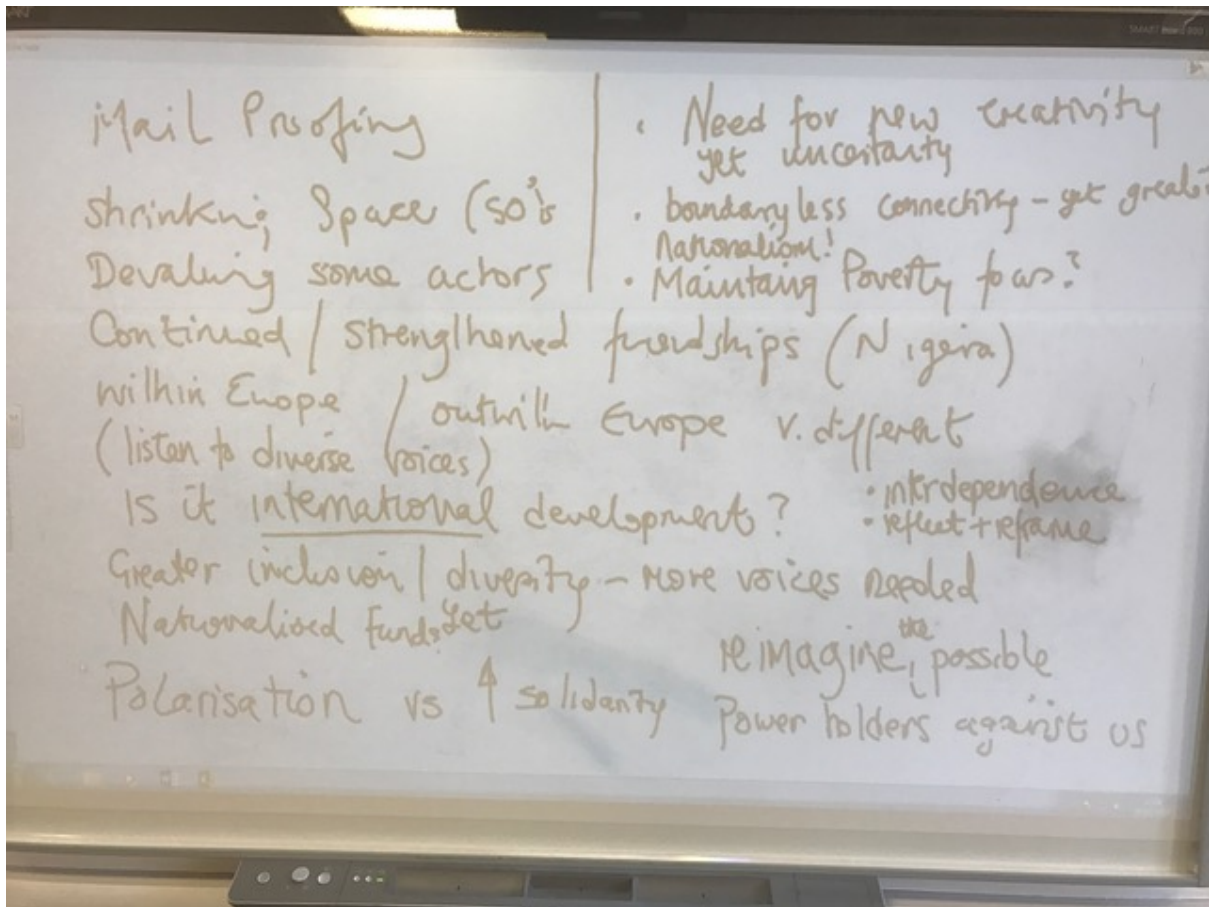
The session started by acknowledging that all present would probably agree that Brexit poses challenges for Britain’s relationship with the world, and that in this context, partnerships may be more important than ever.

Building from this, the convenors asked participants to think a bit more deeply about how they might characterise this current context and to ‘name the moment’ using a word or a phrase.

Participants then responded to these words, considering the barriers, opportunities and strategies to respond to this moment in relation to the overall conference theme of research collaborations for



better evidence for development. Although participants felt quite challenged by the current moment, there were also a range of opportunities identified. The photo below captures the key elements of the group analysis:



Specifically three strategies for academics and practitioner collaboration were identified:

- Working together to create a strong narrative and consensus on international development
- Examining our education systems (especially the higher education curriculum and critical approaches to learning) to ensure that inclusion and diversity are properly integrated, celebrated and understood
- To re-examine/try to deeply understand why we voted Brexit in the first place – if we can engage with this more deeply we may find more creative ways to respond.

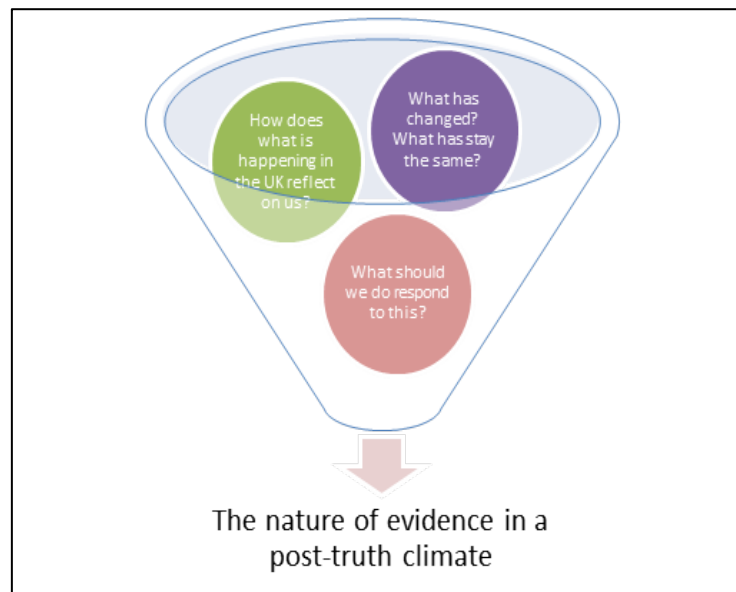
## The nature of evidence in a post-truth climate

### Flora Cornish (LSE) and Jill Russell (ABT Associates)

This workshop explored how shifting public interest in evidence and the nature of evidence impacts on the type of evidence that is valued within research collaborations – whether this is determined by the types of funding available, the institutional expectations, personal interest and motivations etc.

The session leads started by asking participants to consider ‘what has changed and what has stayed the same’ in this post truth climate. Participants acknowledged that there has long been a ‘colouring, misuse and abuse’ of evidence, but that public mistrust of experts has increased in recent years (following the financial crash, the MP expenses scandal and media scandals). This mistrust of experts has interacted with a challenge to the evidence based movement – where it is increasingly the case that while we have presented a rational view of evidence generation leading to appropriate

policy responses there is increasing recognition that evidence does not flow into policy but that there are many complex and complicated factors which impact the relationship between the two.



Participants felt that Brexit and the election of Trump serve to make us more aware of an illiberal anti-democratic shift, with shrinking institutional spaces and spaces for critical debate. Some components of this include:

- The rise of social media, which increases the range of people who can share their views. While people's readership and interaction with news has shifted in response to this wider variety, there is also a growing tendency to read shorter accounts of complex problems, and to flit more between different topics;
- The impact, value for money and results agenda, which has become more pronounced and informs how people think about evidence. At the same time, there is a recognition of the need for 'adaptive management' and 'complexity' and these two areas of thought exist in tension;
- The response to a post-trust society is that you have to justify everything you are doing – especially if you are spending/receiving government funding – you are expected to be able to define results ahead of time, and to measure whether you are achieving this;
- People are becoming more brazen (possibly facilitated the by distancing mechanisms of social media), there is less embarrassment when saying something clearly not true;
- There is an anti-establishment mood;
- There has been a failure of evidence based policy discourse – so much pressure was put on science or research as having all the answers, but when the right answers are not produced or when answers are too complex, the discourse itself contributes to undermining the value of research;
- Linked to this, there is a lack of acknowledging the space /contexts when evidence is too complex to enable a clear policy response.

The participants then split into two groups to respond to the following questions: How does what is happening in the UK reflect on us? And what should we do to respond to this?



In responding to the first question participants noted that we have been complicit in bringing about the current context. For example, as NGOs we have repeatedly ‘promised’ specific results within our institutional funding arrangements, and communicated with supporters as if a technical fix (distributing mosquito nets) has solved a development challenge (malaria) when we know that the reality is much more complex than this (why people do or do not change their behaviour is not just dependent on the mosquito net). Such communication potentially contributes to a general cynicism concerning ‘expert evidence’ and creates space for alternative truths to emerge. Equally challenging is the critique that academics have placed too much focus on ‘impact’ within the world of peer reviewed articles, and have not worked on finding ways to make their evidence accessible to a broader public; or have assumed that producing evidence is enough to influence policy and failing to recognise the complex social and political dynamics at play here.

In response, participants returned to the potential of research collaborations to enable a critical dialogue around the complexities of evidence and to reconcile research integrity or rigour with relevance and responsiveness – ensuring that research is grounded in practice with actual actionable consequences.

## ***1.2 Beyond the British context (and beyond the development sector)***

As well as exploring the effect of the shifting British context on the production of evidence through research partnerships, the conference also integrated a range of perspectives from other contexts. This enabled us to examine whether the findings from the series resonated with experiences in other countries and whether there were additional issues we had missed in developing our thinking. While these perspectives were incorporated throughout the conference discussions, a closing panel session on Day 1 invited reflections from a small selection of international participants and a participant from the community development sector in the UK. The session was chaired by **Enrique Restoy (HIV/AIDS Alliance)**

### **Session structure and approach**

In the closing session of Day 1 we aimed to incorporate insights from beyond the context of the RRP seminar series by inviting reflections on the discussions of the day from contexts beyond the UK and beyond the international development sector. The six participants were invited to consider the extent to which the series findings resonated with their own experiences and whether we were missing other crucial dimensions.

### **Acknowledging emotion and developing critical evidence literacies in communities** **Marjorie Mayo**

(Goldsmiths) stressed the relevance of the series to redevelopment in urban contexts in the UK, and the importance of moving beyond the buzzwords of impact and partnerships to understanding the complexity of collaborative research. Echoing some of the morning presentations, she highlighted trust and shared purpose/value as key, rather than marriages of convenience to target funding opportunities and reflected on the extent that the series findings resonated with her own work in the UK’s community development sector (specifically, work with refugees and around e.g. language policies). A key challenge across the sectors is understanding how partnerships are framed by the pressures on and cultures in institutions (what is rewarded? How to respond to precarious positions e.g. in

universities especially when sustainability of relationships is key) And a key opportunity is the importance of addressing emotions to understand e.g. fear, blame, resentment as driving forces of Brexit/Post-truth politics but also using emotions to communicate findings in ways that touch people. Finally, she reminded us that this work is not just about communities doing their own research but also about developing tools to evaluate and critique existing research/evidence practices.

**Tailoring research to purpose** Representing the perspective of a large INGO's Nigerian office, **Ojobo Atuluku (ActionAid Nigeria)** stressed the importance of acknowledging the reason for the research. In the context of her own work, research is used in different ways – for advocacy, for programme improvement and assessment. Sometimes to understand specific problems. Sometimes opportunistically, as a capacity-building opportunity to raise the profile of the organisation or to develop networks by working with new partners. And sometimes for empowering, organisational development. Obojo stressed how important it is for NGOs to take ownership of these purposes and to use research collaborations strategically, despite objectives often differing from the academic partner. But a key challenge is the issue of timing – both in terms of the conflicting timescales of organisations but also in terms of investing in real time to build on-the-ground relationships as well as trust between different partnerships. Finally, Obojo raised the importance of recognising NGOs as co-researchers and authors of research outputs.



**Responding to competition and MoU culture** **Suzanne Hammad (Qatar University)** reflected on the relevance of the series to the Qatari context, which is witnessing a recent push towards research collaboration, interdisciplinarity and better research impact. Through interviews conducted with stakeholders in the sector Suzanne identified key issues including funding challenges due to a single national research funder and significant competition coupled with recent enforcement of research collaborations as a condition of funding (which results in a lot of superficial 'box-ticking' collaborations). Researcher precarity is also an issue and contributes to insecurity as well as competition and power feuds, which result in further blockages to collaboration. Qatar has a strong MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) culture, however, is this really helpful or rather for show? Can MoUs be transformed to become more substantial and even outcome-based? Linked to this is the importance of actively nurturing relationships rather than assuming that the MoU automatically generates them. And finally, partnerships are never by nature a given good. Methodology is key – we really have to scrutinise the approach within the research collaborations and the extent to which they are genuinely participatory and inclusive.

**Integrating learning and connecting with social movements** **Nesserian Mollé (TCDC, Tanzania)** then went on to reflect on the day from her experiences with TCDC – a training organisation with over 40 years of grassroots work with CSOs in Africa. Her key questions to the group were whether research partnerships are adding value to the work that CSOs are already doing on the ground? And are they also recognising the changing nature/roles of these CSOs? Central to these questions is the potential of learning/training and spaces for critical reflexivity as a crucial dimension of the research-practice relationship. Another important issue relates to sustainable

funding and the TCDC experience has shown that durable partnerships were far more likely to exist where programmes included some co-funding by the project partners. And finally, in response to a shrinking political and civic space in many African contexts, Nesserian highlighted the importance of working with and through social movements and across national contexts – harnessing evidence and research tools to equip citizens with new means of demanding accountability from their governments and the international community.

**The tyranny of evidence-based policy and the partnership discourse** **Andries du Toit (PLAAS, University of the Western Cape, South Africa)** continued by calling into contention the discourse of evidence-based policy making and its place in the neoliberal development project. Reflecting on Brexit, he raised three key concerns for the development research community: First, the implications for resource allocation/funding; second, the assault on the authority of scientific expertise; and third, the crisis of the narrative of what constitutes progress (i.e. incremental change/inclusive growth) which is suddenly in question. Within this he stressed that the notion of evidence-based policy making is not an antidote, but rather part of the problem. The research issue then for him is not so much about providing evidence, but rather contesting dominant narratives of how the world works, which is a much more politically engaged position. This does not mean that evidence doesn't matter, but rather that what counts as evidence always has a politics to it and this must be made explicit. In terms of research collaboration, the question of how research engages with public spaces and social movements in a bid to identify and contest the most powerful and dangerous narratives becomes crucial. However, part of this is about contesting terms like 'partnership' as a reductive Business-school derived term which obscures power imbalances. Andries concluded by asking whether solidarity or alliance were therefore better and more explicitly equitable terms.

**The politics of development linguistics** Finally, **Tom Thomas (Praxis-India)** reflected on one of the main concerns at Praxis (an organisation that engages in community-based research) that is how do we actually make research relevant to the communities we work with? Related to this are two concerns: first, the ability to dialogue with communities in a Freirian sense so that both researcher and community are engaged in critical consciousness-raising, ensuring that research is at the very least not DISempowering – even if it can't empower; and second, the politics of development linguistics. Using the example of grappling with and 'keeping up' with analytical terms like 'bonded labour' which was then transformed by academics in Northern-based institutions to 'forced labour' and then to 'modern forms of slavery', Tom discussed how available research funding reflects these shifts in discourse and therefore becomes less accessible to Southern-based researchers to can't 'talk-the-talk'. He concluded by asserting that research must be combined with applied knowledge as well as grounded realities but also, that it is crucial to come together in solidarity to challenge some of these entrenched inequalities in our research language.

The session concluded with a brief discussion around the following questions:

- How can academics collaborate in solidarity with communities, practitioners and social movements without sacrificing the integrity of scientific research? This is particularly the case for scientific institutions where the survival of the institution rests on the robustness of the research. In response, participants picked up on a point (re-emphasised by John Gaventa in the context of his talk on 'Engaged Excellence' at IDS) that poor research is simply not useful and there should not be a tension between ensuring rigour and relevance for practice.
- Can researchers help social movements generate knowledge? Or are we learning from social movements about knowledge in terms of where these new forms of knowledge are now

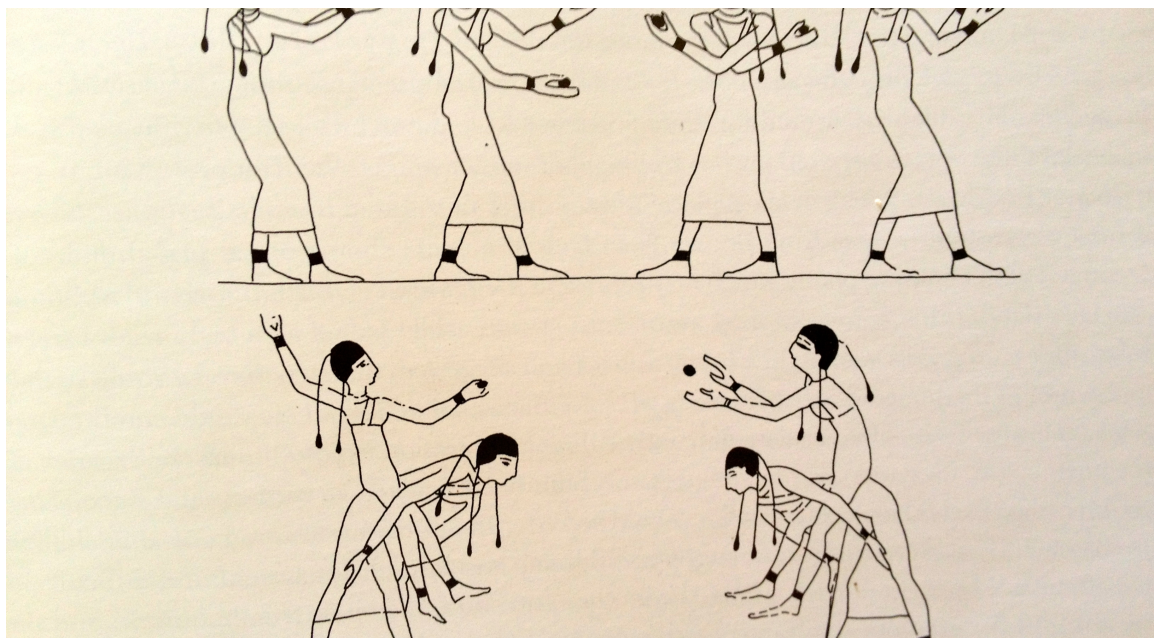
coming from? In response participants suggested the importance of creating spaces for activists to explore and recognise their experiences and knowledge as *legitimate knowledge*. Too often, research partnerships obscure these relationships of knowledge/power so that these types of knowledge are at best not recognised or at worst, exploited. So critical reflexive spaces are essential for recognising and responding to contradictions between knowledges and the ways these knowledges are valued.

### 1.3. The context of the RRP seminar series

The final context-setting component of the conference took the form of a conversation between the RRP series co-convenors **Kate Newman** (Christian Aid Centre of Excellence for Research, Evidence and Learning) and **Jude Fransman** (Open University). Focusing reflexively on the RRP process, they discussed their own research partnership in relation to the focal dimensions:

- context and purpose;
- establishing and sustaining partnerships;
- designing/implementing research;
- communicating research;
- and moving beyond the research.

Within each dimension they gave examples of the influence of research identities (e.g. gender negotiations around pregnancy and parenting); research practices (e.g. participatory design); research artefacts (e.g. publications and the conference itself); and research accounts (e.g. their own representation of the RRP series which will differ from those of the other participants as well as the additional partners who did not participate in the series.)



The aim of this context setting presentation was both to introduce participants to the main themes and analysis that had emerged during the seminar series, but also to model the type of relationships and approaches that had evolved through the series – powerfully disrupting the way research partnerships are sometimes explained – as objectively driven and detached from the personal relationship. By bringing our personal contexts into the start of the conference we were creating an atmosphere to encourage participants to share more fully and engage critically.



## 2. Sharing findings from the seminar series

The first day of the conference focused on communicating the key findings from the RRP seminar series. The series had adopted a case study approach to explore the role of ‘evidence and the politics of participation’ in research partnerships between UK-based universities and international NGOs. One output from the series was a critical discussion guide, aimed at academics and practitioners, to help future partners explore a range of factors as they establish their partnership and develop their research. A *beta* version summary was used as a springboard for sharing the findings, which included a range of issues and questions identified through the series that should be discussed, and key decisions to be agreed at different stages of partnership working. The series had also trialled a range of participatory tools or ‘discussion aids’ to guide analysis of the issues and decision-making. The final version of the guide will incorporate these tools as well as concrete examples from the case studies, and will enable potential partners to explore issues relating to evidence and participation within a research partnership.

The guide is structured around five distinct but interrelated dimensions of the research process:

- Understanding context and purpose
- Establishing and sustaining partnerships
- Designing and implementing research
- Communicating research
- Moving forward, beyond the research

The first day of the conference mirrored this structure and aimed to share the emerging findings from the series and interrogate/expand them further. Participants from the core seminar series designed participatory workshop spaces around the different dimensions, enabling us to trail the guide, and inviting the conference participants to critically engage with and contribute to a stronger version of the resource. The forthcoming guide will therefore integrate perspectives from contexts beyond the UK, from additional stakeholders (including research funders, policy-makers and the public/private sectors) and from beyond the international development sector.

### 2.1 ESTABLISHING AND SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIPS

Co-facilitated by **Alison McKinley (IPPF)** and **Jethro Pettit (IDS)**, this session began by sharing some of the key findings of the seminar series and the key issues and questions identified in the *beta* version of the Discussion Guide.

***Introduction to the ‘Establishing and Sustaining Partnerships’ section from the beta version of the Discussion Guide...***

*Different partners will have different reasons for undertaking and communicating research. Academics may have professional obligations to produce publications, bring in funding and increasingly, demonstrate the impact of their work. NGOs may want to obtain further resources for their work, to influence policymakers in a particular way, or to learn about the effectiveness of a particular programme or organisational practice. A partnership indicates at least ‘overlap’, but not complete alignment, of interests and motivations with the potential for issues arising. How are these to be surfaced and handled? How can partners work with (or better still, take inspiration from) ‘productive tensions’?*

*This section explores the changing roles and relationships within partnerships and over the course of the partnership. It focuses on clarifying agendas and understanding ourselves and each other, both as individuals and institutions. Within these relationships, the idea of 'partnership brokers' is important as is the work around communication and translation between multiple actors.*

*This section also explores some broad typologies of partnership to help partners think about particular forms of relationship and whether these make sense in particular research contexts and serve particular research purposes.*

The session began with some time for individual reflection, with participants invited to comment directly on the issues/questions identified in the Discussion Guide. This provided a valuable corpus of written feedback –particularly from time-starved practitioners who may well have been unable to comment in their own time. Following the reflections, participants then broke into groups to discuss the responses and the extent that the series findings resonated with their own experiences. This involved 'telling stories' about the partnerships they had been involved in establishing and sustaining. The groups were then invited to represent on or more of the stories through an arts-based medium (Lego, modelling dough or a visual representation) illustrating the dynamics of the different actors and their relationships in research partnerships.





Discussions focused on the following aspects of establishing/sustaining partnerships:

- Clarifying purposes and motivation for the partnership
- Understanding ourselves and each other (organizations and roles)
- Understanding Research (assumptions and agendas)
- Taking stock of the resources we bring to research partnerships
- The influence of funding on the partnership, e.g. donor's funding criteria becoming more complex and stringent

Participants compared the early initiation of partnerships to dating in the early phase of a relationship, noting 'it requires flirting and courtship.' Taking that analogy a step further, some discussed the possible response of a research 'dating agency' – an experiment put into practice by ELRHA's [Research Matching Software](#) and the new larger-scale [Research4Impact initiative](#) based in the United States. A point of note here was whether there might be 'romance without finance'? Further discussion centred around the importance of timing and 'windows of opportunity' for good relationships to form. Participants suggested that steps should be taken to pave the way to a smooth and stable relationship, which might involve anticipating tensions that might arise further down the road. It was also noted that partnerships are grounded in relationships and whilst grand MOUs can contribute to institutional buy-in, partnerships need people with time and space to oversee and implement the project on the ground. Other metaphors which allowed participants to engage in creative and critical discussion included:

- the 'sword of truth' figure symbolising the need to clarify motives, agendas, and the need for frank discussions;
- a ladder of opportunity, which symbolised the bridges needed for stakeholders to create new partnerships;
- a river system: if partnerships are a journey, some will end quickly, others branch out, and other are longer term and flow onwards. We need to examine and reflect on how the journey impacts the research.

Finally, participants discussed the power relations within partnerships that determine levels of involvement, ownership and recognition within partnerships.

## 2.2 DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING RESEARCH

The second of the sharing sessions was co-facilitated by **Flora Cornish (LSE)** and **Katie Turner (IVAR)**. After a participatory ice-breaker (encouraging participants to think about their participation in research design/implementation, while introducing themselves and their professional backgrounds) the facilitators gave a brief presentation of some of the findings/questions that had emerged from the series around 'designing and implementing research' and some of the approaches taken.

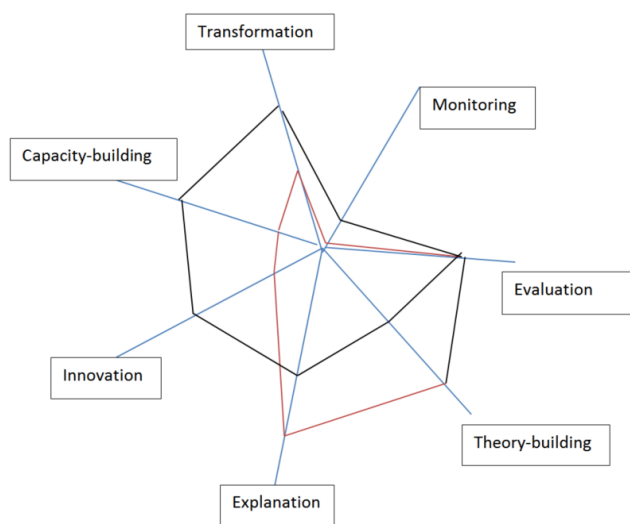
***Introduction to the 'Designing and Implementing Research' section from the beta version of the Discussion Guide...***

*This section focuses on the nuts and bolts of the research – i.e. what to consider in making decisions on the research question(s), research methods; and how the research is run and managed.*

*In many academic-NGO partnerships assumptions are made about the different expertise individuals bring to the relationship, and therefore the different roles the partners will play in the research. At the most extreme, this can mean that the academic dominates in all design decisions, and the NGO merely provides the 'data set' – the links to the people and processes that will be researched. Throughout the seminar series we reflected on the implications of these traditional roles in a partnership: in terms of how research is conceived and understood, whose knowledge counts and what types of evidence produced.*

*This section explores how the processes surrounding research design and implementation can be opened further and be more collaborative. It suggests questions to ask and ideas for challenging the default relationships in research, and it argues that through thinking differently we can open ourselves up to producing different types of knowledge and evidence. However, it also emphasizes the importance of robust research design, key research skills and internally coherent and valid processes, recognizing that these elements are crucial to ensure the quality and impact of any research output. The RRP series exposed research as a complex and iterative process, suggesting there may be many moments of research (re)design and implementation, and therefore many different opportunities to involve academics and practitioners in an evolving research process.*

The facilitators offered examples of how partnerships encapsulate different purposes/priorities (see spider diagram below), which includes the different degrees of prioritisation given by different partners to different aspects of the design/implementation process.



While this can be a challenge and result in problematic tensions, some of these tensions can also be productive. The solution reached in the Discussion Guide was therefore to distinguish between 'things to be agreed' and 'things to be discussed'. While partners don't have to agree on everything, they need to know each other's non-negotiables and understand their constraints and demands.

This introduction led on to group discussions of the tensions (both productive and problematic) that participants in the sessions had experienced in their research partnerships. A number of key tensions were identified, and across these tensions, participants were adamant that the tension was not defined along the lines of 'university vs. NGO', because each partner could be located on either side

of the tension. The tensions identified were all about the understandings of the research, its purposes and approaches. They included:

- depoliticisation vs (re)politicization;
- excitement about innovation vs concerns about 'is it actually going to work?';
- proving what you already know vs. generating new knowledge or action;
- independence and critical distance vs. validating one's worth;
- global commitments vs individual contextualizing;
- institutionally-defined relations vs. personal individual relations;
- community concerns with the potential action/political implications of the research vs. concerns about abstract 'knowledge for its own sake'.

Many of these tensions can be conditions of creative emergence and triggers of critical and useful thinking and action. To allow for that creative emergence, two important enablers were identified:

- reflective time and spaces (creative emergence is not possible in the panic of deadlines and deliverables);
- leadership and co-leadership to create those spaces.

## 2.3. COMMUNICATING RESEARCH

The third of the sharing sessions was co-facilitated by **Ruth Kelly (ActionAid/University of York)** and **Kas Sempere (IVAR)**.

### ***Introduction to the 'Communicating Research' section from the beta version of the Discussion Guide...***

*Research communication is often viewed as an add-on to the knowledge-production process: an endpoint whereby 'key findings/lessons', 'headline messages' or 'policy recommendations' are disseminated to external stakeholders. In academic settings, the focus may be more on demonstrating a study's 'contribution to knowledge' by writing up the theoretical and/or methodological frameworks and highlighting emerging research agendas or 'avenues for future research'.*

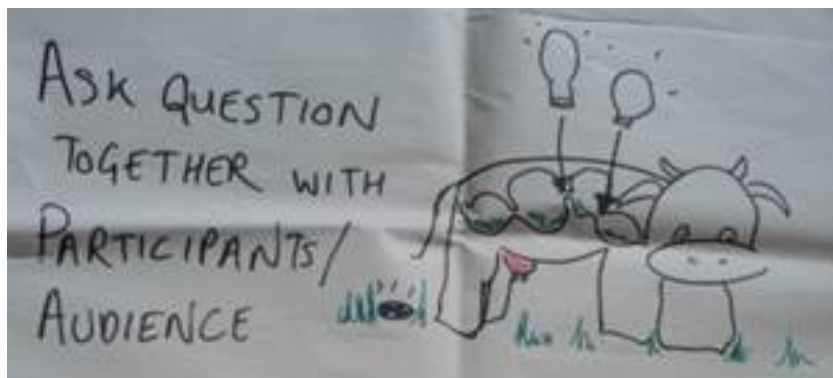
*However, the case studies from our series showed that communication is about more than simply disseminating research outputs at the end of a project. There might be considerable value in communicating parts of the research process (e.g. through a project blog which might also invite in feedback on the research approach and any challenges arising from external 'followers'). In a large-scale partnership, there may also be the need for internal communication at various points in the research. This might take the form of initial proposals, concept notes, MOUs or Codes of Conduct. Face-to-face meetings to agree methods for data collection and analysis might be supplemented with written records in the form of minutes, reports or co-constructed visualisations. These internal and process-oriented types of communication serve an important learning function in addition to clarifying the agreed approaches and findings. They provide spaces and resources for reflection: for acknowledging differences in ideas, languages, values and agendas; for developing understanding and capabilities; and for responding to uncertainty/flexibility (which might involve anything*

*from staff turnover and organisational changes to the sudden emergence of new priorities/opportunities).*

*Communication also involves questions about representation. As well as selecting which of the 'evidence' or 'data' should be included in outputs, choices must be made about the form that evidence/data takes. Presenting findings as tables or charts, statistics or quotations, diagrams or artwork will have implications for the ways they are valued by different audiences and the extent to which they might be accessed, understood, incorporated into other texts (e.g. policy briefings or PowerPoint presentations) and adapted for use in different contexts. These choices are both practical and political.*

*And finally, the way that research is disseminated will also have implications for how it is accessed and used. The issue of whether to disseminate outputs as electronic or hard copies is well rehearsed, as is the issue of accessibility through open sourced versus pay-walled repositories. Linking resources to the websites, mailing lists or repositories of particular 'broker' organisations can be a useful means of improving 'uptake' and might add a symbolic value through association with particular institutions. Similarly, adhering to particular types of dissemination (such as peer-reviewed journals) might add to the status of the research but may also carry implications for the way that research must be represented and the audiences it is likely to reach.*

The facilitators started the session by introducing a definition of research communication to mean the process of sharing the research with others (including but not limited to research dissemination, e.g. through the media or in the form of 'killer facts'). Crucially, this is not a process that takes place just at the end of a project. Participants noted that sometimes we want to engage an audience, and sometimes we want to broadcast our research more generically. We need to think about what the problem is and who is required to solve it. Then we need to involve those people in defining the question and doing the analysis in order to generate demand/support/ownership from the start. Making the audience part of the research journey is key and linked to this is the importance of sharing working versions of research materials – from proposals and concept notes to analysis and research outputs. If the audience can engage with and process/digest the research over time, they will be more likely to remember it and to integrate the findings into their decision-making for policy and practice.



Participants developed a powerful analogy of the 'research cow' to locate communication within an iterative research process. With the grass representing the data, the stomach representing research

processes (i.e. digesting and creating manure) and the cowpat representing the research outputs or evidence produced through the process. Participants agreed that if research is an iterative process, time is essential for reflecting on findings and allowing ideas to spark other ideas (or new ways of thinking about ideas we've already had). In some cases, our audience can help us with this and even be part of the process.

However, even in projects where the goal is engagement, sometimes key 'headline messages' will be important to generate/sustain interest; these might take the form of 'killer facts' (though some participants argued that for research to be credible it must move beyond the use of data as a simple advocacy tool), counterintuitive findings, or interesting framings/narratives.

Participants also agreed that communication should engage emotion as well as intellect/reason, while demonstrating the practical implications of the research. A suggestion was made to think simultaneously about heart, head and action. While abandoning reason should not be a goal, it is important in a post-truth world, to go beyond the rational. This links to the representation of findings – what types of outputs will cut through the dominant narratives, incorporating a diversity of knowledges?



Participants therefor explored how we might represent our research visually or in emotionally engaging formats (like film) and how we can effectively transmit our own curiosity and enthusiasm to our audiences. Participants came up with a useful expression: affective communication can be effective communication. They also agreed that we need to think more carefully about translating complex research ideas into formats that an audience can understand and engage with, like Nick Sousanis does in his comic on the Paris climate talks for *Nature*, e.g. visualizing how a graph translates into rising sea levels and more extreme weather.



Source: <http://www.nature.com/news/the-fragile-framework-1.18861>

Finally, participants recognised that we need to better understand the political economy of change: evidence may influence change but it is rarely the primary driver of change. Where does evidence fit

in to the politics of change and how can we leverage evidence as we engage in that political process? How can we play the system? Do we value change at national/international levels over equally important change at local levels? How are the different levels linked? Should we be more attentive to doing research that responds to the priorities of the communities or people we are working with and enables them to work for change?

## 2.4. Beyond the research

In the final sharing session **Julian Walker (UCL)** and **Andrew Clenaghan (Practical Action)** discussed the final section from the Discussion Guide: moving beyond the research.

### ***Introduction to the 'Beyond the Research' section from the beta version of the Discussion Guide...***

*The seminar series and this Discussion Guide have focused primarily on exploring the place of evidence and the politics of participation within research partnerships. However, these discussions also involve some consideration about what will happen to the research beyond the partnership: how might the evidence generated through partnerships be used in other contexts? What sort of impact might the research have? To what extent can/should this be attributed to the partnership? And what types of actors, processes and resources could be mobilized to facilitate this? These questions relate to the final part of the framework presented in Section 1.4 – the transformative potential of partnerships or the question of how power works through partnerships. There is an extensive body of literature on evidence for policy and practice and on the complex mechanics of facilitating access, uptake and use (e.g. du Toit 2012; NESTA/Alliance for Useful Evidence 2016; Georgalakis et al 2017). But impact in a more localized sense (or the effects and affects of the research partnership) can also be tracked. Changes to the individuals involved in the partnership might include the development of new skills, practices, languages, sensibilities and confidence (for instance a stronger sense of self as a researcher). New networks grounded in shared values, ideologies and understandings might emerge through the partnership. The agendas, structures and processes of the partner organisations might expand or shift as a result of the partnership. New tools, resources, templates, technologies and even infrastructures might materialize. And the language of 'research partnerships' might also be influenced with implications for policy rhetoric and discourse.*

*Two dimensions are central to this transformative agenda: first, the ongoing importance of learning in partnerships (which might involve carving out reflexive spaces for individuals and groups); and second, the ways in which the partnership is evaluated (in order to attribute specific changes to the partnership and generate lessons for future partnerships).*

*This will also have implications for how partnerships are concluded or taken forward. While the case studies reviewed for the series were broadly 'successful' there may be an argument for aborting research partnerships if they are not adequately serving the interests of the partners involved (which might have changed over the course of the research), if relationships have become unsalvageable, or if new risks have been identified as the research unfolds. There is a tendency with project-based funding to*



carry on regardless and to present all publically funded projects as successful. This approach can lead to huge resources being invested in work that is at best unusable and at worst, damaging. At the same time, there is significant learning that might emerge from ‘unsuccessful’ partnerships – if adequate space is given to exploring this and if the institutions involved (from research funders, implementers, brokers and end-users) are receptive to that learning.

Participants were asked to think about partnerships that they are/ have been involved in, and to discuss their aspirations for the legacies of these – i.e. what they would have liked to be the lasting outcomes of the research/partnership. The facilitators then divided the responses into two groups: i) aspirations for the research outcomes; and ii) aspirations for changes that the partnership has made to the wider research context/ political economy of evidence. Across these two categories, participants were then invited to identify key questions that they would need to consider in pursuing these aspirations.



The questions that were identified are presented in the Table below:

Aspiration for Legacy of the partnership	Questions/ issues to consider
<b>Changes resulting from the Research (‘Knowledge to change the world’)</b>	
Practitioners have increased capacity to contribute and be heard in academia	How can capacity-development be supported by each partner institution? What are the desired ‘end goals’ in terms of personal learning/development and institutional capacity-building for each partner?
Research knowledge changes policy – i.e. new laws and guidelines  ‘Knowledge to change the world’	To what extent is the research accessed and by whom? To what extent is it adapted to suit the needs of different users? How is it used? How can we capture the application of learning?
Knowledge that fulfils everyone’s aims (local scale AND that can be used widely in the world	How to plan for a good ending from the start?
Research process shifts power (e.g. research	What are the expectations about what partners

into unpaid care work in Nepal which shifted household power relations)	can contribute after the end of the research?
Practitioners are able to embed research into their practice	How is learning integrated into institutional practice and policy?
Legacy of knowledge 'in the field' (capacity, empowerment, new action, sustaining local partnerships)  More innovative dissemination – plan for it from the start	What ongoing labour is necessary to translate research into use? Is it paid/ rewarded? What are the incentives?
Awareness of the issue/ action on the issue	How can the specification of research questions and/or rationale be informed by end-users from the start of the research?
Raising of alternative knowledge/ unheard voices	Who's voices are included/excluded from the research and what are the implications for the knowledge produced? How can alternative voices be best represented? Should this be within or in addition to primary research outputs? Can alternative knowledge/voices be integrated after the formal end of the research?
There is movement between the NGO and the academic world – 'walking in each others' slippers'	What forms do the outputs take? What's the timescale of research-into-use? Who owns outputs and to what extent can they be adapted to suit specific usage needs? Who has access to knowledge?
Structural issues are addressed as the result of the collaboration between different perspectives	Who owns the data? What to do with data? (Tensions and complexity of openness should be considered?)
<b>Changes to the political economy of evidence (the context in which research is produced)</b>	
Shift towards adopting empowering methodologies	Can the ending address power issues that were not dealt with at the start?
Bridges across timescales	Is there a possibility to continue or scale up research – or is it really the end? What lessons about process/knowledge can be learned when considering why a piece of research – or research partnership – should or shouldn't end?
Partners can meet as equals in knowledge spaces	What constraints does each institution have and how can we overcome them?
Valuing the journey – not just the outputs	What types of process can best build trust? (open? Frequent coms, understanding constraints, exploring organizational/ cultural differences)
Better relationships between academics and NGOs... transdisciplinarity	Sustaining trust based relationships - draws on shared political views or on 'fun' (pleasure in working together)
Sustaining evolving networks	Who is missing? How can the research or the partnership be adapted/expanded to include?

INGOs and Universities help identify new partners and funders for local grassroots and community organisations	What mechanisms exist for introducing/match-making partners?
Embedding participatory research into everyday practices (the NGO)	How can ongoing research support an organisational development and capacity-building function? How can we carve out space for critical reflection?

General observation made across the two different groups included the realisation that ‘the end is the beginning’. Groups emphasised that there is a need to think about the legacy of the research/partnership from the start and understand different partners’ aspirations for what the legacy of the research will be. Or to put it another way, ‘what is each partners’ happy ever after for the research and the partnership’? And crucially, how do we ensure that evidence is translated into practice? The group discussed different levels of engagement in the context of fewer funding opportunities and considered whether ‘less is more’ if we genuinely value durable relationships and high-quality, responsive and inclusive research over short-term opportunistic project-based marriages of convenience.

### 3. Channelling learning into policy and practice

By ensuring that the seminar series itself was a critical, reflective and participatory space (an approach also taken at the conference) we aimed to encourage participants to take forward their own learning from conversations into their own practice. There is good evidence that this is happening from feedback we had at the conference and by email afterwards. However, we also wanted to create space to consider how we could collectively channel learning into practice – considering the roles, relationships and opportunities of the different sectors involved in research collaborations – academics, NGOs, funders and brokers. Much of the second day of the conference was framed around encouraging thinking about what could be done differently in these different sectors.

This section of the report is split into three sections:

- Innovations in policy to support equitable research collaborations
- Changing practice (open space sessions)
- Manifestos for good practice

#### 3.1 Innovations in policy to support equitable research collaborations

##### Showcasing research policy

In order to get participants to think more creatively about how research collaborations could operate differently, we began the second day with a panel discussion, showcasing seven examples of research policy that aimed to improve the generation of useful evidence through better research collaboration. The contributions were chosen as we felt that they offered different ways of thinking about funding or conceptualising research which responded to some of the insights and challenges identified during the seminar series.

**Supporting sustainable partnerships** Drawing on learning from research funded by the British Council, **Claire McNulty** set out some key lessons, which has informed their strategy going

forward. Acknowledging the remit of the British Council – which means that any intervention needs to contribute to UK benefit alongside benefit in country she emphasised the importance of long-term relationships for mutual benefit. This includes the importance of adopting a long-term approach to ‘impact’ with implications for the way programmes are evaluated as well as for the sustainability of partnerships. Echoing a key finding from the seminar series, she went on to stress the importance of trust as a basis for effective research relationships, recognising that this doesn’t just happen because there is a funding opportunity. And finally, she addressed the creative opportunities for incorporating multiple knowledges in to research (e.g. through interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral collaborations; acknowledging different contribution within published articles and the importance of inclusive engagement strategies.



### **Encouraging effective research collaborations**



**Long term** approach – impact can take many years to materialise – especially ‘secondary’ benefit to the UK

#### **Building Trust**

The importance of Face to Face – backed up by virtual.  
Pipeline of opportunities – workshops, travel grants, longer-term research collaborations

#### **Interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral**

Space to experiment - and need for recognition of different contributions

#### **Diversity and Inclusion**

Support engagement of all – regardless of gender, disability, ethnic group etc .

**Claire McNulty, Director of Science, British Council**

Collaborative research is not a given good; investing in time Keri Facer (University of Bristol) then went on to discuss the AHRC-led [Connected Communities programme](#) as a large-scale experiment in interdisciplinary co-produced research between academics and community-based organisations in the UK. Key innovations emerging from the programme included the

allowance of CSO (civil society organisation) partners to be funded and recognised as Co-Investigators, a two-staged funding process with time built in for establishing partnerships and collaborative design, inclusion of CSOs in the peer review processes and a 50% involvement of CSOs in large grant development workshops. In her talk, Keri raised the importance of recognising diversity in both the HE (Higher Education) and CSO sector and the existing context of inequalities that collaborations will enter in to. She argued that if these contexts are not named and actively contested, there is a risk that partnerships can reproduce and intensify existing inequalities. Related is the need to go beyond partnerships as a quick fix so that the dual components of knowledge and action are genuinely integrated. In achieving this she stressed that collaborative research is a method like any other and can be done well or badly. To do it well requires expertise and reflexivity as well as an understanding of the rich history of collaborative traditions and approaches with their specific agendas and framings.

### Policy Panel and Approach

For this panel we asked speakers to share their experiences for 5-8 minutes, outlining what was innovative in their approach or way of thinking about research partnerships, to inspire participants to think differently about what 'could be' in academic-NGO research collaborations. We deliberately invited people who had not been part of the earlier seminar series to bring in new thought and ideas and to ensure that the process was learning from practice in other sectors (including the UK community development, scientific research and broader teaching-learning continuum).

productively to unsettled identities/hierarchies. Adequate funding is also essential to democratise the research process, however, funds can also impose competition on partners and interfere with trust. Short-term funding can be disruptive to the core activities of smaller organisations. Keri concluded with 4 recommendations: i) improve the infrastructure by building capacity and combatting precarity; ii) recognise the importance of time and link research with teaching/learning to create sustained relationships; iii) explicitly tackle the risks of enhancing inequalities through partnerships; iv) invest in and support civil society's public learning infrastructure.

## The Connected Communities Programme

Professor Keri Facer  
University of Bristol  
@kerileef



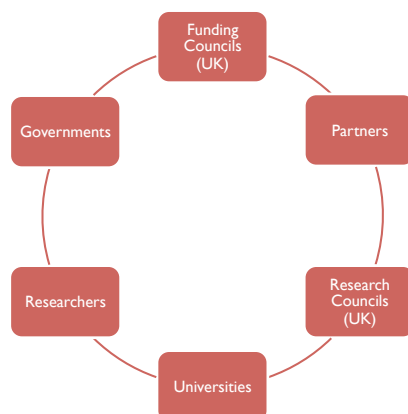
**Supporting co-owned impact** **Melanie Knetsch (ESRC)** addressed the challenges facing funders around supporting impactful research for international development. Highlighting the importance of a good conceptual basis for impact as well as early involvement with non-academic partners and academics in the Global South in the design phases of research, Melanie proposed a model for the co-ownership of impact by multiple research stakeholders, which goes beyond accountability to funders. She then proceeded to present key innovations in ESRC policy in support of better collaboration and ultimately, more impactful research. These included: calls for strategic multi-stakeholder networks to address specific challenges and encouragement of partnerships with organisations beyond academia; a funding rhetoric focused on challenges to encourage transdisciplinary solutions and promote relevant and responsive collaborative working; introducing a range of timings in funding calls to allow for short-term targeted research as well as longer term programmes (though this must be balanced against the constraints of the Treasury timetable which sets the framework for available funding); and finally, the inclusion of more civil society organisations and academics from the Global South in peer review processes and panels.

Economic and Social Research Council



## Achieving impact – funders perspective

Who owns impact?



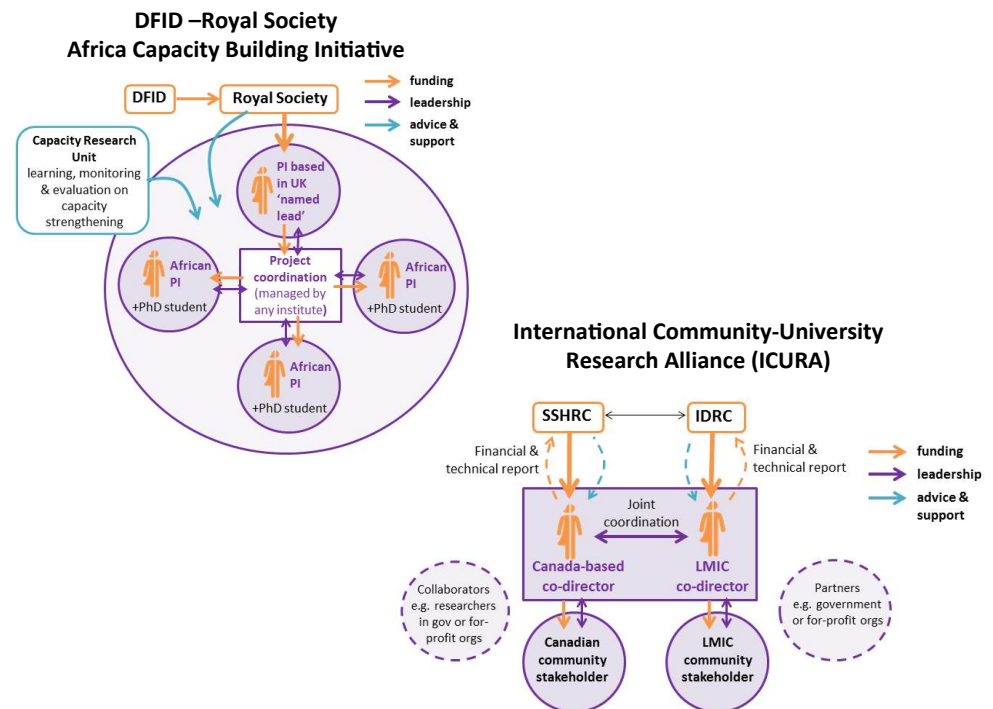
- ▶ **Determinants of impact**
  - Conceptual often leads to instrumental
  - Early involvement with partners/countries
- ▶ **Our policies – P2I, costings**
- ▶ **Design of calls**
  - Partnership
  - Language – challenge led?
  - Timings
  - Peer review and Panel

**Improving equitable funding practices** Next, **Jennie Dodson (UKCDS)** introduced the findings from a recently completed study on ‘the role of funders in equitable and effective international development research collaborations’. The study involved interviews with research funders about the detailed models and practices they have used in eleven North-South research programmes as well as surveys to Southern science funders and ministries about their perspectives on these programmes. In her talk, Jennie gave examples of two models of North-South research collaboration and discussed some of the practices that funders have implemented with the aim of increasing the fairness of research partnerships.



She concluded by identifying a list of 10 ways in which funders might influence equitable partnerships:

- inclusive agenda-setting;
- funding new research questions and valuing complementary skills and knowledge;
- setting the tone around expectations of equity within partnerships;
- rewarding skilled project managers and team players;
- looking for equality beyond the project leaders;
- equitable budgets, research and financial management;
- providing ongoing institutional capacity strengthening;
- widening participation;
- investing for the long-term;
- working closely with other funders and agencies in the North and South.

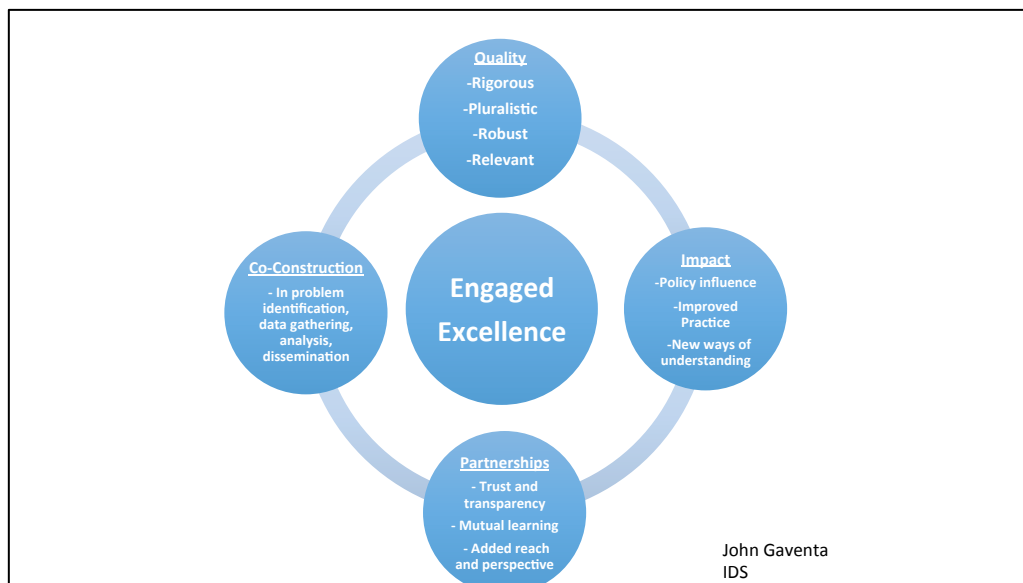


**Promoting open research** Focusing on innovations in digital research, **Patrick MacAndrew (Open University)** spoke about the importance of being more open in research, supporting open educators and sharing examples and lessons about what works. After discussing the different flows of evidence from Higher Education but also a range of other knowledge stakeholders and challenging assumptions about evidence preferences, he went on to make a case for the relationship between open educational resources and open research practices as a means of capacity-building for collaboration as well as a way of exploring different knowledge practices within collaborations.

### Evidence for Openness

Patrick McAndrew  
The Open University

**Achieving Engaged Excellence** John Gaventa (IDS) made the case for Engaged Evidence – contesting the notion that collaborative research necessarily involves a compromise in rigour or ‘scientific excellence’. He focused his talk around the four key dimensions of this: quality (which is rigorous; pluralistic; robust and relevant); impact (influencing policy, improving practice and enabling new understanding); partnerships (grounded in trust and transparency, mutual learning and added reach and perspective); and co-construction (in problem identification, data gathering, analysis and dissemination). Speaking with some optimism about the future, John reminded the group that in the past these conversations were unheard of, and it is therefore important to recognise the progress that has been made – while also acknowledging and responding to the critical challenges of the current context in the UK and beyond.



**Pioneering knowledge from the Global South** Finally, offering a perspective from the Global South, **Marina de Regt (SEPHIS)** discussed the work of the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development. She began by outlining the key innovations of the programme that included: the establishment of South-South research partnerships, primarily between academic institutions; incorporation of perspectives from the Global South into ongoing research agendas in the humanities and the social sciences; and intellectual and institutional capacity-building in the South but also in the North. She then went on to discuss the key obstacles to the work of SEPHIS, which include diminishing support in the face of changing agendas of funding institutions, increased national self-interest within policy agendas, and the question of how to extend equitable partnerships to support sustainable research work and integrate the perspectives of other knowledge stakeholders.

In the ensuing discussion, participants identified the following issues and questions (focusing particularly on the challenges to innovation around better collaboration for evidence):

- How to map and synthesis the different funding calls and pathways of different funders with their own mandates/agendas, structures, processes and timetables?
- How to navigate rigid timetables set by the treasury to ensure responsive and sustainable research funding?
- How to bridge the teaching/learning and research agendas of HE?

## 3.2: Changing Practice

The policy panel presentations raised a number of issues around the intricacies of research funding and developing/sustaining cross-sectoral collaborations. To allow participants to probe some of these in more depth, two of the four parallel policy workshops on Day 2 were dedicated to 'innovative funding' and unpacking the dynamics of 'cross-sectoral collaboration'. An 'open space' session in the afternoon then enabled volunteers to identify and lead a series of five further parallel sessions, to extend the morning discussions and think further as to how practice might adapt and respond to the challenges and opportunities discussed during the conference.

### Innovative approaches to research funding

The workshop started with a general brainstorm to identify key components of an ideal funding call. These were grouped around the following themes:

- **Improving the accessibility of funding calls**
  - Better framing of calls (e.g. accessible/simple, co-constructed, useful, relevant, encouraging transdisciplinarity, valuing multiple knowledges/clarity of expectations about success rates/clarifying actual amounts of money and allowances)
  - Improving the accessibility of application systems like Je-S (both in terms of usability, language and genre – particularly for non-academic participants)
  - Enhancing accessibility of calls through Town Hall Meetings
- **Supporting proposal development**
  - Transparent and participatory development of pre-call criteria in dialogue with multiple development stakeholders
  - Supporting proposal-development and networking through 'sandpits', conferences and match-making events (ensuring these are non-exclusionary, open and accessible) that are useful in themselves in terms of capacity-building/networking regardless of funding success
  - Incorporating clear stages into proposal development e.g. i) Gateway stage to promote understanding of the call context and networking; ii) First-stage proposal to develop research questions and processes; iii) Mentorship stage including support for unsuccessful projects; iv) bridge-funding in between projects.
  - Providing a dedicated project manager to support applicants through the process – and to compile feedback on the process

#### Session approach

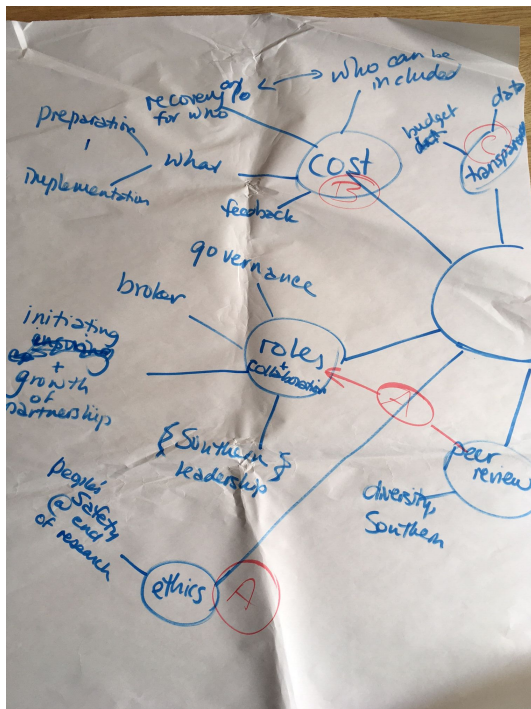
This was one of the four parallel policy workshops which ran on the second day of the conference. Participants were asked to sign up to one of the four sessions, this was one the best attended, with around 40 participants, signalling a particular interest among participants in funding policy!

The session was led by by **Melanie Knetsch** (ESRC), **Irene Guijt** (Oxfam) and **Keri Facer** (University of Bristol/Connected Communities) and structured around the following questions:

1. **What would our ideal co-produced international development research call for proposals look like?**  
What principles would it propose for co-production between partners? How would the funding be arranged/distributed? What would be included/excluded from costs? What sorts of partners would be specified? How would the call be promoted and over what timescales? What sort of timescales could the research be funded over? Who would be allowed to bid and on what basis? Who would be excluded?
2. **What would get in the way of delivering this?**
3. **What could be done to overcome these obstacles?**

- **Learning/capacity-building**

- Clear feedback on applications including advice on how to develop the ideas and other sources of funding
- Practicing partnership development fund to build partnership capacity, learning from previous initiatives
- Links to capacity-building of academic and non-academic researchers e.g. through academic support organizations such as NCCPE and Vitae and non-academic organisations such as INTRAC
- Feedback loops for researcher funders to allow them to reflect on their own funding calls/processes and incorporate learning
  - Incentivizing reflexivity/learning in research



- **Improving sustainability/ensuring impact**

- Calls oriented towards sustaining existing partnerships but also creating new programmes and partnerships
  - Incorporating specific criteria for evaluation of impact/engagement within the peer-review process
    - Linking research calls with knowledge-exchange/engagement/impact-focused calls (e.g. capturing on-ground change)
    - Ensuring institutional buy-in beyond the end of the funded research
      - Dedicating a significant proportion of available funding to collaborative design/interpretation/translation and communication (not just analysis and production)
      - Dedicating a proportion of the available funding to immediate and later impact evaluation
- Enabling/incentivizing flexibility in research design to allow genuine responsiveness to emerging evidence needs

- **Inclusive costing**

- Clear guidance on who can be included in costs and recognition of the real costs of applicants and partners' time (responding to diverse partners and contexts)
- Budget transparency
- Recovery costs/payment, particularly for non-academics and academics from the Global South
- Acknowledgement/reward for preparatory effort (phased calls, short EOIs and funded development of proposals)
- Realistic expectations for the funding available (ethical and non-exploitative)
- Ensuring fair rates to avoid private sector overpayment

- **Roles and collaborations**

- Acknowledging roles for research managers/brokers as well as researchers
- Diversifying peer reviewer pool to include non-academics and those from the Global South (not just the 'usual suspects')
- Expanding research leadership to non-academics and those from the Global South
- Enabling multiple budget holders to reflect shared power and buy-in from both partners

- **Ethics**
  - Taking into account not just the safety/integrity of researchers but the safety/integrity of those mediators/end-users who are involved in research communication/mobilization/impact
  - Incentivize principles of good practice? (e.g. flexibility, diversity)

Participants then split into smaller groups to explore in-depth obstacles to these ideal-type proposals and possible responses. The following obstacles were identified:

- **Understanding the differences between funder agendas/priorities** – there is a vast range of research funding in the UK and funders have different mandates, which frames their approaches. Most researchers/institutions will target multiple sources of funding so a key challenge is to understand and harmonize these opportunities to enable sustainability as research programmes and partnerships move from one funding source to another.
- **Understanding funder timescales** – e.g. for RCUK funders these are set by the treasury and insurmountable. Therefore, changing funding practices also involves a negotiation with policy-makers and governmental structures
- **Historical, structural and material limitations to the systems in place** (such as Je-S) – getting the balance right between changing these systems and improving capacity for a more diverse range of participants to use them effectively
- **The specific nature of (some) research funding**– are diverse partnerships always right? This will depend on the nature of the problem/call but in some areas there is a case for pure, academic research
- **How to consolidate substantial learning from previous funding programmes** that have trialled different approaches to partnerships? – e.g. lessons from DFID/Newton Fund and see UKCDS report
- **Responding to changing global and national priorities** – involves achieving a balance between supporting long-term research programmes and partnerships and creating fast responses to emerging crises requiring specific expertise
- **Institutional buy-in to research partnerships** is not just the responsibility of research funders and there is a danger that institutions such as universities see this purely as a funded-research activity. How to encourage the fostering of partnerships within institutions independently of research funding (e.g. through the work of the NCCPE)?

In response to these challenges, the groups proposed the following ways forward:

- **Getting funding schemes to ‘talk to each other’** – this would involve a two-pronged response, involving: firstly, the development of a clear map of the funding ecosystem in the UK to improve applicants’ understanding of the funding environment enabling them to chart out specific routes for sustainable partnerships and programmes; and secondly, developing synergies between funders in terms of principles, processes and practices; sharing learning between funders and consolidating capacity-building initiatives
- **Understanding and transforming funding timescales** – this would involve a more coordinated response to developing sustainable partnerships and research programmes within and across research funders (e.g. opportunities for ‘seed’ or ‘bridge’ funding between to extend/adapt/evaluate research programmes and for expansion of networks) but also contribute to applicants understanding of e.g. treasury timetables and the implications for planning long-term programmes.
- **Integrating and building capacity of non-academic and non-UK based researchers** – this would involve committing resources to build the research capacity of peer-reviewers, particularly from civil society and the Global South and work with transnational networks to develop the reviewers pool of regional and thematic experts from these groups. Crucial to this would be the cost-recovery of the time of these individuals.



- **Formalising learning/feedback loops for research funders** – while this has been occurring informally and through select events, there is no formal mechanism for PIs to feedback their learning to RCUK funders. Creating a dedicated space for sharing lessons about work in partnerships could make a evidence-informed contribution to funders’ ongoing strategic/organisational development
- **Improving institutional buy-in of research organisations** – this might be incentivized through by mandatory commitments on the part of the budget-holding institution beyond the research funding (e.g. in terms of continued support for the researcher-development of the partners and an ongoing relationship with the research partners)
- **Funding some research into the global political economy of research** – the British research-funding sector does not exist in isolation and it would be helpful for researchers and funders alike to have a sense of the relationships between funding in the UK and other international research funding for international development.

## Cross-sector collaboration game

This session was led by **Nicholas Palfreyman (University of Central Lancashire)** and took the form of a board game to explore cross-sectoral collaboration. Participants were invited to take on different roles (representing academia/NGO/CSO/business/government) in a hypothetical partnership setting. The players then move around the board picking up cards relating to their role (e.g. “You have to produce internal briefings at short notice, but the academic partners are not available to help. Lose a turn to catch up on the extra work” or “your partners accept your suggestion to include an explicit paragraph on institutional culture in the Collaboration Agreement. Move ahead four steps.”) Play focuses on the different stages of research partnerships and players are encouraged to reflect on the dynamics at each stage.

The session was introduced and then participants played the game in small groups – this was followed by a plenary debrief, which focused on the following questions:

- How did you feel during the simulation?
- Did you achieve what you expected?
- What surprised you in the game?



### Session approach

The policy sessions had been designed by the conference organisers to respond to what we felt were key issues in enabling and constraining successful research partnerships. But we also felt it was important to give participants the opportunity to form into groups to discuss key issues that they felt were important when considering ‘evidence and the politics of participation in NGO-academic research partnerships’. We deliberately situated this session towards the end of the conference with the intention that participants would feel inspired, empowered and confident enough to lead their own sessions, it was part of the process of translation learning and reflection into their own practice, to encourage people at the conference to consider how the discussions related to their work. Any interested participant was invited to make a maximum 60 second pitch to the plenary on their interest area, and then lead a discussion with anyone who wished to join them.



Key reflections included the recognition that the process of developing partnerships itself took a very long time, and progress was often slow. Participants observed that in reality communication activities tend to happen near the end of the process for the purpose of dissemination and little time is dedicated to this – or indeed to engagement activities throughout the process. Reflecting on the game, participants agreed it was useful to ‘sit in somebody else’s shoes’ and experience the process from an alternative perspective. Discussion also focused on how the game might be used as a research method in place of a focus group. For more information on the game see:

<http://www.theimpactinitiative.net/blog/blog-cross-sectoral-collaboration-are-you-game>

## **Being Revolutionary – challenging development discourse**

**(Anna Mdee, University of Leeds)**

The pitch started with a critique of the workshop to that point, suggesting that the debate was responding to the current way development is framed globally and arguing that this understanding of development needs to be challenged. If research collaborations are to present development alternatives then we need to critique the current paradigm, and understand how it is being recreated within research collaborations. By stepping back and engaging with development at this level we can start to explore alternatives, but what does this actually mean in practice?

The session highlighted a renewed interest in post-development ideas and recognition that the development project itself is institutionally racist. The participants argued that in the context of the shifting political landscape, development studies and development practice cannot afford its current complacency or self-righteousness. Acknowledging that very little of our frustrations or reflections on partnership and the business of doing development are new, the participants asked what types of different thinking is needed? Revolutions require new visions, and new possibilities: but genuine change will need to shake the rotten development industry to the core. The group considered whether we have the guts to take this on (collectively and/or as individuals) and what it might involve in practice.

## **Capacity Development of civil society within research partnerships**

**(Rachel Hyman, INTRAC)**

Participants discussed the following core questions:

- Can we improve capacity building of local non-academic partners in relation to research skills and use of evidence within collaborative research projects?
- What methods and approaches generate lasting research capacity within partners?
- What issues do we need to consider to break down some of the existing stereotypes about roles of practitioners?

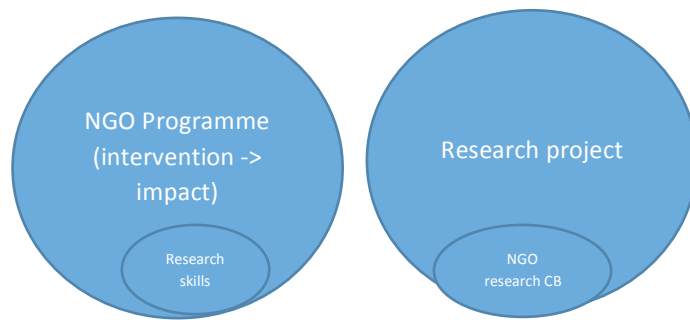
### **Main discussion points:**

#### **1. How well do we understand (or seek to understand) local research capacity when we start a research initiative or an intervention programme?**

The discussion explored where research fits in to different types of intervention, be they academic research or NGO programmes, and therefore the lens through which we are considering capacity building. This included a recognition that within an NGO programme intervention we might build the capacity of our local partners in the overall intervention approach; but may see the research element as separate to this. Equally, within a research project we might frame the intervention as an impact component, but not part of the research per se – and therefore limit civil society

participation to the 'impact' component ignore their participation in the 'research' component. This constrains how we view the role of Southern-based civil society organisations in research; and limits the capacity building offered.

Core observations included the need to be aware of tokenistic capacity building: **don't limit capacity building of NGOs in research projects to training workshops – NGOs should improve capacity building for research within programmes.** Participants also considered whether a proportion of funding should always go to research capacity development (which too often is a low priority)?



## 2. What sort of capacity building are we talking about?

Participants identified three areas of capacity building

- Around specific tools and individuals for the research project and tasks in question?;
- Building capacity to engage and

contribute to research (to co-create) is different to building capacity to use evidence, including in relationships with communities or stakeholders;

- Research skills 101 is important to enable participants to gather, interpret, assess the quality of, and use research; participatory action research.

The core reflection here was the need for **multi-directional capacity building (including from CSOs to academics, and from South to North)** that looks across the spectrum of CB 'for whom, 'for what', etc.

## 3. Taking a long-term approach but with a clear way out

Discussion here was on rethinking long-term research capacity in a given context, with a suggestion that we should focus on nurturing a system of collaboration between southern academic/research institutes and southern civil society; so that the role of the northern partners (academic and INGO) become peripheral. A key question here was

- Can partners develop a greater agency to demand what they need?

The core reflection here was that funders should be pushed to consider the capacity building of partners as part of the research fund as integral to lasting impact.

## 4. Recognising the value of 'hidden' capacity building as part of research impact

A final discussion point emphasised the extent to which capacity building currently remains hidden, but that it would be relevant to capture learning on transferable skills as part of research impact, beyond answering the research questions.

## Beyond Projects– building long-term (knowledge) relationships (Fran Seballos Institute of Development Studies; and Alison Mckinley IPPF)

The central challenge was to identify and share tools, approaches and experience in building long term partnering relationships between institutions outside funded projects and programmes.

## Key areas of discussion

## **1. Developing institutional relationships**

The dialogue started by examining the ways in which organisations can institutionalise partnerships, while at the same time considering whether institutionalisation is always necessary. There was a sense that institutional partnerships can contribute to sustainable relationships by preventing reinventions of the wheel at the individual and project level (with every new funding opportunity), but that in order to be affective they need senior buy-in.

Participants agree that there is a need to consider different levels of engagement and different kinds of partnership – what is appropriate and what can be resourced? The key aim is to keep the loops open that can be facilitated informally through time-to-time exchange of knowledge and information, although someone needs to take responsibility for relationship management. There is also the critical challenge of resourcing and investing in this kind of work.

Some specific ideas included:

- Building connections with partners – giving a junior fellow (academic) responsibility for a relationship, which might also give them ‘status’;
- Half a day once a quarter to share programmes and identify opportunities;
- PhD/postdoctoral exchange programmes which integrate teaching into research partnerships;
- The OU example of Honorary Associates: the OU provides physical space, time and one-to-one engagement (which requires resourcing). There are barriers to international relationships using this model as visas / employment law complicate initiatives – how can we mobilise UK Embassies overseas to support exchange visits?
- Institutional immersions – these also need resourcing.

A key question was then identified around whether the capacity to broker partnerships also needs to be institutionalised.

## **2. Making the most of the effort within projects and programmes**

The challenge of time and resources for institutionalising relationships, was balanced by a discussion looking at how to effectively mobilise learning on partnership within existing projects and programmes that support a deeper understanding of the other, and ultimately deepen the relationship.

The focus here could be on emphasising an attitude change – and focusing on partnering through learning in the project management cycle, facilitating discussions at key points within projects on the ‘relationship’ dimension. Tracking learning around relationships within projects can lead to a shared understanding of the value added of partnering and the collaboration, a deeper understanding of the challenges of the ‘other’ and a strong foundation for moving forward. Then the proposal process is seen as a continuous form of building partnership.

Such learning can contribute to building an evidence base for valuing partnership; a body of knowledge on co-production.

## **3. Opportunities**

Moving forward, participants identified the following opportunities:

- Explicitly acknowledge that (INGO: academic) research processes strengthen links between policy and practice;

- Review whether the ‘impact’ agenda legitimises time spent on partnership;
- Invest in capacity building to develop common understandings of frameworks of analysis and methodological approaches.

## Academic integrity in the changing Higher Education (HE) context

(Elaine Unterhalter, Institute of Education)

The group (which consisted entirely of academics) discussed the shifting context of higher education and whether the current increase in focus on participating in research around development challenges was stepping in solidarity or displacing agendas? The group questioned whether research outputs were for a reason or whether the reason for research was becoming the output?

While participants all wanted to contribute to better research collaborations for the ‘right’ reasons, they were also aware that the expectations and challenges of the profession can make this difficult. A key challenge identified is that academics are expected to work in highly individualistic ways (with research success attributed to individuals rather than teams) and there are therefore difficulties in making connections between academics, or in nurturing research collaborations more generally. There is a need for critical friends to sustain relations over a long period to keep posing the question: who do we think we are? How inclusive are we really? Are we engaged in promises or deceit? Such questions might encourage academics to ‘see ourselves as others see us’.

Some interim steps:

- Exploit mission statements; taking them at face value;
- Acknowledge inequality and develop support groups for those excluded e.g. for women, contributing to critiques of social capital, challenge conditions and connecting to local groups within and beyond the university;
- Its important to build on connected vulnerabilities and solidarities; work on links with schools and other institutions.

The group concluded by reflecting on whether critical theory is the right paradigm for exploring these issues or whether something else is needed.

## New/artistic methods for thinking about co-production

(Ruth Kelly University of York and Kate Carroll, ActionAid)

This session on alternative methods introduced ActionAid’s recent work on developing alternatives – which has involved a collaboration with other NGOs, research institutes, networks and movements to develop well evidenced, compelling narratives to act as alternatives to dominant narratives of development. Ruth and Kate used the open space session to share ActionAid’s thinking in this idea; and to ask for critical and constructive feedback from participants around its relevance to new forms of evidence and alternative research partnerships.

ActionAid is hoping that this approach will gain momentum, and that there will be interest in alternative narratives in order to effectively challenge power. It is also hoped that by using a highly creative methodology to generate these alternative ideas the approach itself will facilitate stronger collaboration between partners.

In the process that ActionAid has just begun, artists and academics will work together to explore alternative visions of development, prompted by various participatory and creative tools. They will then co-create a piece of art, as a symbol of their vision. These artefacts will form the basis for

further discussions in different communities across each country. The gaps and questions identified through these discussions will lead to the development of research projects and further partnerships.

Alternative methodologies were explored in groups to help participants think about alternative visions of economic and social development. Testing the methodology, one potential utopia was acted out and the group then reflected on the elements within the presentation that they liked and what they disliked. The group then discussed whether the scenarios methodology was a useful way to explore the articulation of an alternative narrative.

### 3.3 Manifestos for good practice

The final session of the conference focused on developing sector-based manifestos for good practice around supporting collaborative research for better evidence production and use. Three manifestos were produced for the following groups:

- NGOs
- Academics
- Broker/Funder organisations

#### NGO manifesto for 'Evidence for Development'

While there are many reasons why academic-NGO partnerships are complex (and at times both partners can feel like the other is a different species) there are also many good reasons to work together – to make the most of the productive tensions that exist to produce quality usable evidence for development. At the heart of this is a recognition of the importance of 'joining hands' to confront the current challenges in International Development in Brexit Britain. These are many and varied, including the idea of 'aid in the national interest' and the ideological preference for the rise of the private sector. The need to work together to influence practice includes work between NGOs and academics, but also work across groups of NGOs to collaborate in producing evidence. In addition, it requires some internal advocacy – to work with our colleagues to really understand the value of 'good' evidence.

As part of this aim we believe that NGOs should:

- **Have a research strategy** (to ensure that we don't just get led along by opportunistic partnerships that we are not properly able to participate in, and therefore do not produce evidence that is useful for us);
- **Invest** (our limited unrestricted resources) **in long-term flexible partnerships**, which are based on a long-term visions for development, and are able to respond collectively when appropriate – recognising that from within long term partnerships we can respond opportunistically to funding

#### Session approach

This was the only session in the whole conference where we split people into groups and asked them to consider learning from the perspective of their specific sector.

Each individual was asked to consider how they would respond to the issues that had arisen over the two days; then share their ideas in small groups, before working collectively as a sector to identify the key actions that could be taken as a sector (or key commitments that could be made) to contribute to positive research collaborations and commitments for better evidence for development.



calls, but that we can also act as critical friends/collaborators and produce evidence aligned with our organisational interests; this also implies the importance of moving partnerships **from individual to institutional** to ensure that partnerships can evolve with institutional needs;

- Recognise that there are **multiple different knowledges**, which are appropriate and necessary in different contexts – but that we need to **engage with these multiple knowledges critically** (i.e. just because we are used to working in grassroots contexts and siding with those living in poverty we should not romanticize their knowledge – which may not be appropriate in shifting environmental, political, social and economic contexts);
- When entering a partnership – whether this is a long-term or opportunistic/ project based partnership – **articulate the specific added value of that partnership** – spend time thinking about the motivations, expectations and roles;
- **Be confident and ask questions of researchers** – do not assume that just because they are ‘academic’ they have all the knowledge of methodologies, be clear about what our needs are, what we are committing to, and be willing to revisit the questions over time as things change which can influence needs and possibilities of a research process;
- **Explore potential of integrating research and M&E** – many of us have invested more in M&E/MEL over the past few years due to funding requirements, than in research. While MEL is important (especially when it focuses on ‘improving’ (and ‘transforming’) rather than just ‘proving’) it can be a missed opportunity for investment in more strategic and longer-term research. Equally there may be opportunities to involve academics in MEL processes which could make these processes more impactful;
- **Invest in embedding research /translating research into learning and practice** – we all have experience of evaluation reports that don’t lead to changed practice; and we are aware that there are many stages to enable learning from research influence practice (cf. the digestive system of a cow....);
- **Build influencing and communication into the research process itself** – if research is to influence practice this needs to be thought of at partnership development stage, and again during design and implementation – not see as an add on at the end;
- **Develop ‘non-negotiables’ around our research collaboration practice** – to be clear about where we will compromise and what our bottom lines are when we enter a partnership/design research – this should include information about what we expect our role to be, and the role of capacity building, the role of southern partners etc.;
- **Contribute to the development of a researcher/research database** – a place where researchers and NGO practitioners can post research questions that they are interested in answering, or research skills they have on offer, or practice that they want to engage with etc.;
- As INGOs with greater power and connections than many of our partners in the global south we also must play our role in challenging **funders** to adapt the calls, e.g. for the inclusion of low-capacity partners, and to make them long-term – we must recognise that we have an important role to play in changing the broader context of research partnerships in general.

## Academic manifesto

The academic group identified a series of commitments that they would make as individuals within their own practice; as well as broader commitments to engage in transforming the practice, and the possibility for practices in the sector.

### As individuals we will

- Put energy into **building long-term relationships** and **focusing on achievable objectives**;

- **Play the system** – exploiting opportunities for doing the work we know from our partners is important and carving out spaces for critical engagement and to transform the more rigid structures in HE when we can;
- Find genuine reasons for committing resources and efforts into **collective action around common political agendas** – do ‘sh\*t that changes the world’;
- **Broaden dissemination practices** into engagement/communication throughout research processes, utilising multiple modes of communicates and types of media;
- **Identify likeminded allies** and networks within and beyond the sector;
- **Connect with natural scientists** to enhance interdisciplinary practice and to ensure that the critical thinking and recognition of power that is more common to the social sciences and arts/humanities is integrated into the sciences;
- **Decolonise the curriculum** – acknowledging the entrenched inequalities and integrating excluded voices/knowledge;
- **Strengthen our voice by connecting with others networks and initiatives** such as the African research partnerships award, the Impact Initiative, DSA groups;
- **Challenge the normative concept of partnership** – and linguistic hierarchies, developing a better and more power-conscious terminology;
- **Remain optimistic and creative** - ensure that we don’t get fall into the trap of doom and gloom around everything;
- **Consider the question ‘what is my activist practice’** and develop this as part of our researcher/academic identity – even if it is not formally acknowledged;
- **Go for dinner!** Make space to keep these discussions and networks alive.

#### Collectively we will

- Seek to **understand why we are in this position** (cf. post truth/Brexit etc.) and based on this develop strategies to respond;
- **Sustain the ‘Rethinking Research Partnership’ network** and connect with southern civil society and academics;
- **Connect partnership with teaching** – take a more create approach to teaching – and develop MA modules on research partnerships;
- **Integrate reflexivity, creativity and critical thinking into development studies;**
- **Nurture early career researchers** and get them involved;
- **Engage donors** in the need for more cross-sector collaboration;
- **Support the sector to remain independent** and engaged in policy and practice.

### Broker and funder manifesto

As a group of support organisations (including brokers, trainers, consultants, funders, and network organisations) the group focused on the role they could play around bringing people together. They committed to:

#### Continuing our cross-sectoral role through:

- Regularly bringing governments, civil society and academics together in different contexts
- Empowering champions of research collaboration;
- Looking for applied research funding – for example focus on how the challenge funds (GCRF) can stimulate innovation;
- Holding events which include panels of speakers from a range of sectors;

- Creating spaces for dialogue – ensuring that on entering these spaces participants are respected as equal and ensure all are contributors to the discussion.

#### **Shifting the thinking:**

- Bringing new people, groups and organisations into the rethinking research process – for example other research councils and researchers from the natural as well as social sciences;
- Identifying ‘positive deviants’ who are doing well in different research councils and challenge the assumptions of what research councils should be doing.

#### **Exploring different funding modalities:**

- Including a research element within different forms of programme based funding; and include a civil society action/activism element within research funding;
- Directly funding civil society-academic research partnerships in the global south/ or global partnerships led by a southern based university;
- Funding dialogue and joint-capacity building initiatives, recognising multi-directional capacity development (north-south; south-south; south-north; practitioner-academic; academic-practitioner etc.);
- Using technology to make the funding chain/distribution more transparent – blockchain and IATI/open data can all be used to see where the money has gone.

## **4. Evaluation and conclusion**

In the opening presentation Jude and Kate noted the challenges of convening a conference for such a mixed audience; there is a certain style of conference which is expected by each sector; and we were concerned that by bringing together at least two distinct audiences we would fail to communicate to either – anyone employed in a communication role will emphasise the need to know your audience and tailor your communication approach to their needs and expectations, and communication challenges were frequently the theme of research partnerships explored during the seminar series.

Despite this challenge we had felt it was important to bring together this diverse group of people, and to design the majority of sessions to include participants from both audiences. We also tried to design the event as a coherent and cumulative process – which assumed that participants would attend the full 2-days. This created some challenges, as some of those who could not attend the full event experienced gaps in the focus of discussions. On the first day participants were mainly positive in their feedback, but there were some frustrations shared, especially around the lack of engaging with the wider context of Brexit and a ‘post-truth’ environment – which were topics we covered on the second day. Another issue was that the participatory, interactive approach took time and that it was hard to balance the full agenda and range of topics with adequate opportunities for input and to do justice to the complex discussions. Some participants felt that the panel discussions were too quick with little time for plenary questions and answers. In terms of the representativeness of the event, participants also observed the social science bias in the presentations and participants (favouring research grounded in the social sciences/humanities/arts rather than the natural sciences). This was a valid critique and a limitation of the conference. On the positive side, the majority of participants applauded the level of energy in the room, the participatory approach and the spaces provided for critical thinking, reflection, discussion and networking. By the end of the second day the comments were overwhelmingly positive and included the following:

- Valuable insights that will improve my research partnerships. Worth the investment.
- I feel responsible to share the lessons learned here with more people/ other networks
- Participatory sessions were great. I liked the mix of structure with opportunities to talk freely and learn from experience.
- What worked well? Birth of a group that will go on!
- SO many opportunities out of the common challenges.
- Takeaways: inspired, motivated, refreshed and in awe!
- Excellent panellists with very valuable, well worked out contributions.
- I learnt through interesting discussions about research alliances and solidarity instead of partnerships.
- Good facilitation and range of methods. Great and imaginative discussions.
- Very good mix of INGOs and academics and commitment to dialogue and long term partnerships= positive outcome.
- Great ideas on collaboration between academics and practitioners.
- I learnt there are possibilities of solidarity in the current climate.

The feedback from across the participants therefore suggested that it is possible to create a process where academics and practitioners learn together, and maybe we are not as different as we think. The day closed with a plea to participants to ‘watch this space’. While the initial ESRC funded seminar series is drawing to a close we hope that there will be new opportunities for collaboration and to translate the learning from the series into practice.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I:

#### **Call for Expressions of Interest for ESRC Seminar Series Final Conference: ‘Producing Evidence for Development in Brexit Britain’**

The recent ratification of the SDGs heralds a new landscape of evidence for international development. A broader conception of ‘development’ combines with heightened pressure on policies and interventions to demonstrate their ‘evidence base’ and for research to demonstrate its usefulness. This has implications for the notion of expertise: whose knowledge counts? And how can diverse sources of knowledge from multiple stakeholders be usefully combined?

In response, ‘research partnerships’ between different actors (including academics and practitioners from NGOs) have gained attention as means of producing research that is both high quality and actionable. A number of studies have highlighted the benefits of collaboration between traditional researchers and the users and mediators of research. However, these same studies have also identified significant challenges facing partnerships, including divergent priorities, schedules, and capacity; knowledge hierarchies and power relations.

These partnerships were the focus of **a recent ESRC-funded seminar series, which mobilized an extensive network of universities and international NGOs to explore the issue of ‘evidence and the politics of participation in academic-INGO Research Partnerships’**. The series took a case-study approach, involving the presentation and analysis of seven cases of research partnerships. While these case studies could broadly be characterized as ‘successful partnerships’, the series identified and analysed a variety of challenges and tensions arising from collaborations. Despite the range of

evidence preferences and research approaches adopted by the partnerships, and the diversity in scale and distribution (with many of the case studies involving additional partners from the Global South), the common thread running through the cases was the importance of understanding the context in which the partnerships were formed. The dynamics, agendas and priorities of the UK's INGO and academic context (including policy and funding mechanisms for research and development) impacted on motivations for partnerships and shaped the types of evidence valued in partnerships with implications for the prioritization of certain approaches, skills, roles, knowledge and languages. A key aim of this event then, is to share lessons from the seminar series from a UK-perspective while incorporating actors from the Global South, in addition to people working in other UK sectors, to engage with these insights, and affirm, challenge and extend them.

Recent events in the UK have amplified the crises of identity affecting both Higher Education and international NGOs. Universities are responding to a national 'impact agenda', which calls for the evidencing of applied uses of university research, and may blur traditional boundaries around the role of academic research in relation to knowledge produced by other actors (including public-sector think-tanks, private-sector consultancy firms and the media as well as NGOs). In an era of austerity, International NGOs are challenged by increased attention to domestic charitable giving and cynicism surrounding the case for aid; alongside shifting global power relations leading to a (positive) emphasis on civil society in the global south. This is compounded by the increased presence of private sector consultancy firms in development; and the rise of online campaigning organisations. Against these pressures, both types of institution are being forced to redefine their authority as experts and their role in generating evidence and to re-examine their place within the knowledge-for-development ecosystem.

These crises are also heightened by a culture of 'post-truth politics' in which expertise itself is regarded as suspect. They are likely to be further exacerbated as the Brexit process unfolds, through changes to national policy, and changing relationships with the EU, the United States under its new president and the rest of the world. Universities and international NGOs face massive uncertainties, but also potential opportunities. Positive responses to this context might include charting out spaces for new research collaborations with counterparts in the global south; valuing alternative knowledges and perspectives; broadening traditional research approaches; and recognizing and contributing to increasing research capacity in civil society in many countries. At the same time, there are challenges to these opportunities, including those embedded in publications such as DFID's new research strategy which highlights the role of the UK as "a global leader in scientific, research and technical expertise" and emphasizes the importance of working in partnership, while also implying a very unidirectional export model for research (DFID: October 2016).

This high-level conference will explore the prospects for productive research partnerships for international development, initiated in 'Brexit Britain' – referring to the complex and uncertain Brexit process itself as well as to an eventual post-Brexit reality. The two-day event will aim to:

1. Share findings and recommendations based on the analysis of seven case studies of research partnerships between UK-based universities and INGOs (which formed the basis of discussions in the seminar series).
2. Assess the challenges and opportunities of the current UK development context, including the recently released DfID research review, the SDG processes, Brexit and the shifting landscape for development research collaborations
3. Respond to and extend this analysis with insights from beyond the UK and from other policy sectors within the UK



4. Explore strategic ways forward for the practice, governance and funding of research and development

Please provide a short statement (no more than 300 words) detailing your experience in this area and explaining why this event is of interest to you and how you would hope to contribute. Spaces will be allocated by the end of January and some funds will be available to subsidize travel and accommodation.

## Expression of Interest

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Job Title\_\_\_\_\_

Organisation\_\_\_\_\_

Place of residence\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX II: Conference agenda

# Rethinking Research Partnerships

Evidence and the Politics of Participation in Academic-INGO Research Partnerships



## ‘Producing Evidence for Development in Brexit Britain’

March 27<sup>th</sup>- 28<sup>th</sup> 2017: UCL-Institute of Education, London (ELVIN HALL)

### DAY ONE

Time	Activity
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09.00	Coffee and registration
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09.30	Welcome and introductions  Panel: Key challenges and opportunities for research for international development in the current climate
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10.15	Overview of the series: ‘Rethinking Research Partnerships’
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10.45	Speed-dating exercise
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11.00	Coffee break
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11.30	Sharing the series findings: session 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishing/sustaining partnerships</li><li>• Designing/implementing research</li><li>• Communicating research</li><li>• Beyond the research</li></ul>
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13.00	Lunch
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14.00	Sharing the series findings: session 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishing/sustaining partnerships</li><li>• Designing/implementing research</li><li>• Communicating research</li><li>• Beyond the research</li></ul>
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15.30	Coffee break
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16.00	Panel: Incorporating insights from beyond the context of the seminar series
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17.00	Reflections and evaluation
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17.15	Drinks reception
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## DAY TWO

Time	Activity
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09.00	Coffee and registration
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09.30	Welcome, introductions, reflections from Day 1
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10.00	Panel: showcasing research policy
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11.00	Coffee break
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11.30	Parallel Policy Workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Innovative approaches to research funding</li><li>• Cross-sectoral collaboration board game</li><li>• The nature of evidence in a post-truth climate</li><li>• Britain's relationship with the world</li></ul>
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12.30	Plenary and world café pitches
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13.00	Lunch
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14.00	World café / open space (policy areas to be identified in the previous session)
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15.00	Coffee and Gallery Walk
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15.15	Manifestos for 'good practice': productive collaborations for useful evidence through research
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16.15	Reflections and evaluation
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16.30	CLOSE
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## APPENDIX III: Participant list

Surname	Forename	Organisation
Apriyani	Melisa	UCL-Institute of Education
Atuluku	Ojobo	Action Aid - Nigeria
Aberlen	Emilie	AFD - France
Archer	David	Action Aid (UK)
Baker	Leila	IVAR (UK)
Begum	Halima	(UNICEF/UK)
Bercilla	Jessica	Christian Aid - Philippines
Brown	Chris	UCL-IOE (UK)
Buckler	Alison	OU (UK)
Burns	Danny	IDS (UK)
Butcher	Stephanie	UCL (UK)
Carlbaum	Christian	SIPU - Sweden
Carroll	Kate	Action Aid (UK)
Chen	Yali	UCL-Institute of Education
Chowns	Ellie	VSO (UK)
Clark	Janet	VSO (UK)
Clenaghan	Andrew	Practical Action (UK)
Collins	Chik	University of the West of Scotland (UK)
Copestake	James	University of Bath (UK)
Cornish	Hilary	Christian Aid (UK)
Cornish	Flora	LSE (UK)
Crack	Angela	University of Portsmouth (UK)
de Regt	Marina	SEPHIS/ Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Dodson	Jennie	UKCDS
du Toit	Andries	University of the Western Cape - South Africa
Dhungana	Nimesh	LSE (UK)
Ebay	Jorge	University of the Philippines - Visayas
Edge	Karen	UCL-IOE (UK)
Facer	Keri	University of Bristol (UK)
Ferns	Joe	Big Lottery Fund (UK)
Footitt	Hilary	University of Reading (UK)
Fransman	Jude	OU (UK)
Gabriel	Madeleine	NESTA (UK)
Gaventa	John	IDS (UK)
Georgalakis	James	IDS (UK)
Godfrey	Anna	BBC Media Action
Greenhalf	Jessica	BOND (UK)
Grieve	Tigist	University of Bristol (UK)
Guijt	Irene	Oxfam (UK)
Hall	Budd	University of Victoria - Canada
Hall	Teresa	Care International (UK)
Ham	Teri	UCL-Institute of Education

Hammad	Suzanne	Qatar University
Harle	Jonathan	INASP (UK)
Hayman	Rachel	INTRAC (UK)
Hemfrey	Louise	Womankind (UK)
Hinds	Kate	UCL (UK)
Huaynoca	Silvia	IPPF/ WHR - USA/Latin America
Ibrahim	Solava	University of Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin University
Jian	Zhu	UCL-Institute of Education
Jobling	Ruth	Brooke: Action for working horses and donkeys (UK)
Kabanga	Charlie	ALL WE CAN / Methodist Development and Research Fund (UK)
Kelly	Ruth	Action Aid/University of York (UK)
Knetsch	Melanie	ESRC (UK)
Kumi	Emmanuel	University of Bath (UK)
Lewis	Carla	World Vision (UK)
Lewis	David	LSE (UK)
Littlejohn	Allison	OU (UK)
Lloyd	Delia	BBC Media Action
Long	Andrew	DFID (UK)
Lopez	Desiree	Flamingo
McAndrew	Patrick	OU (UK)
Majid	Shamse	UCL-Institute of Education
Marriot	Heidi	IPPF (UK)
Marsh	Andrea	UCL-Institute of Education
Martel	Andréanne	CCIC - Canada
Matafeni	Taitos	Save the Children (UK)
Mayo	Marjorie	Goldsmiths (UK)
Mayhew	Susannah	LSHTM (UK)
Mckinley	Alison	IPPF (UK)
McNulty	Claire	British Council (UK)
Mdee	Anna	University of Leeds (UK)
Miranda Morel	Luisa	CARE International (UK)
Mistry	Sarah	BOND (UK)
Mollet	Nesserian	TCDC -Tanzania
Morgan	Vicky	UKCDS (UK)
Narayanan	Pradeep	PRAXIS, India
Newman	Kate	Christian Aid (UK)
Nogueira	Fernando	São Paulo Business School - Brazil
Ondicho	Mourine	UCL-Institute of Education
Orengo	Yvonne	Andrew Lees Trust (UK)
Palfreyman	Nick	University of Central Lancashire (UK)
Palmer-Felgate	Sarah	ELRHA (UK)
Papaioannou	Theo	OU (UK)
Patel	Kamna	UCL (UK)
Pelling	Mark	Kings College (UK)
Pettit	Jethro	IDS (UK)
Porter	Gina	Durham University (UK)



Rasamoelina	Landy	UCL-Institute of Education
Restoy	Enrique	HIV/Aids Alliance (UK)
Roche	Jose	Save the Children (UK)
Russell	Jill	ABT Associates (UK)
Seballos	Fran	IDS (UK)
Sempere	Kas	Christian Aid (UK)
Shaxson	Louise	ODI (UK)
Stuart	Francis	Oxfam (UK)
Taner	Lisa	OU (UK)
Thomas	Tom	PRAXIS, India
Turner	Katie	IVAR (UK)
Unterhalter	Elaine	UCL (UK)
Veloso	Rocio	UCL-Institute of Education
Vieira	Luiz Fernando	The Bretton Woods Project (UK)
Vincent	Nicolas	AFD - France
Walker	Julian	UCL (UK)
Walsh	Martin	Oxfam (UK)
Whitty	Brendan	(UK)
Yanacopulos	Helen	OU (UK)
Zalia	Davina	UCL-Institute of Education
Zeshan	Ulrike	University of Central Lancashire (UK)